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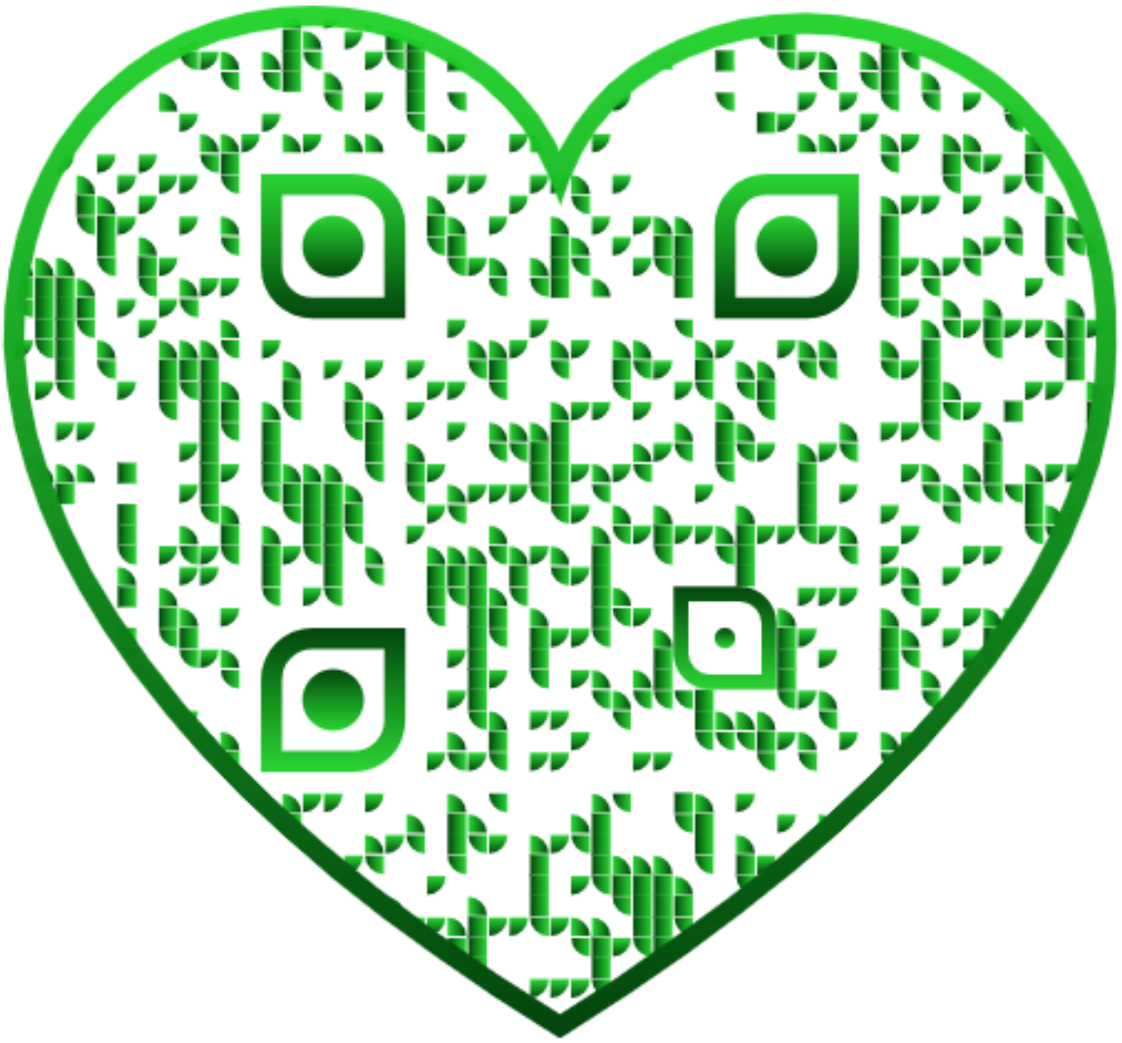

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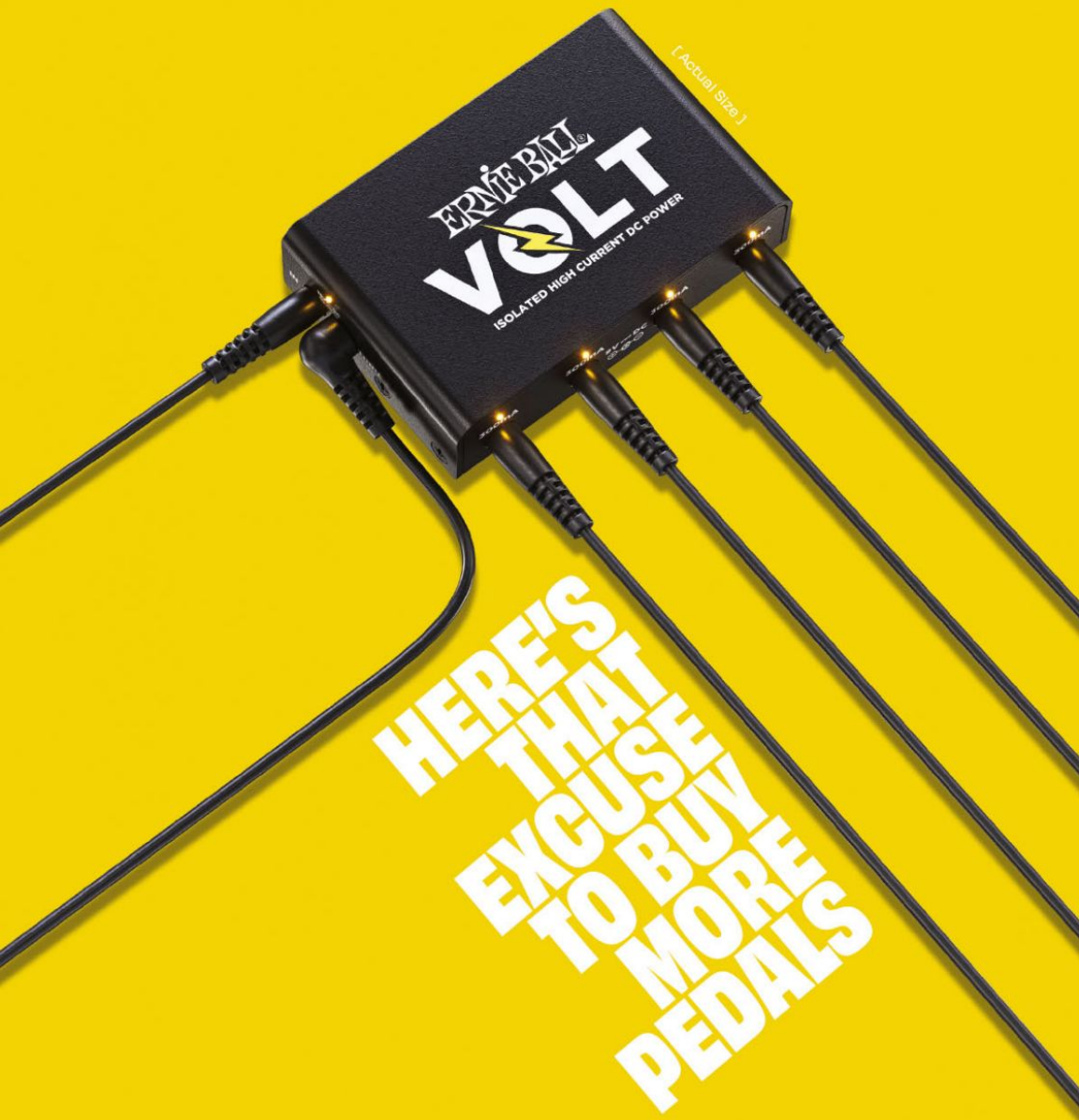

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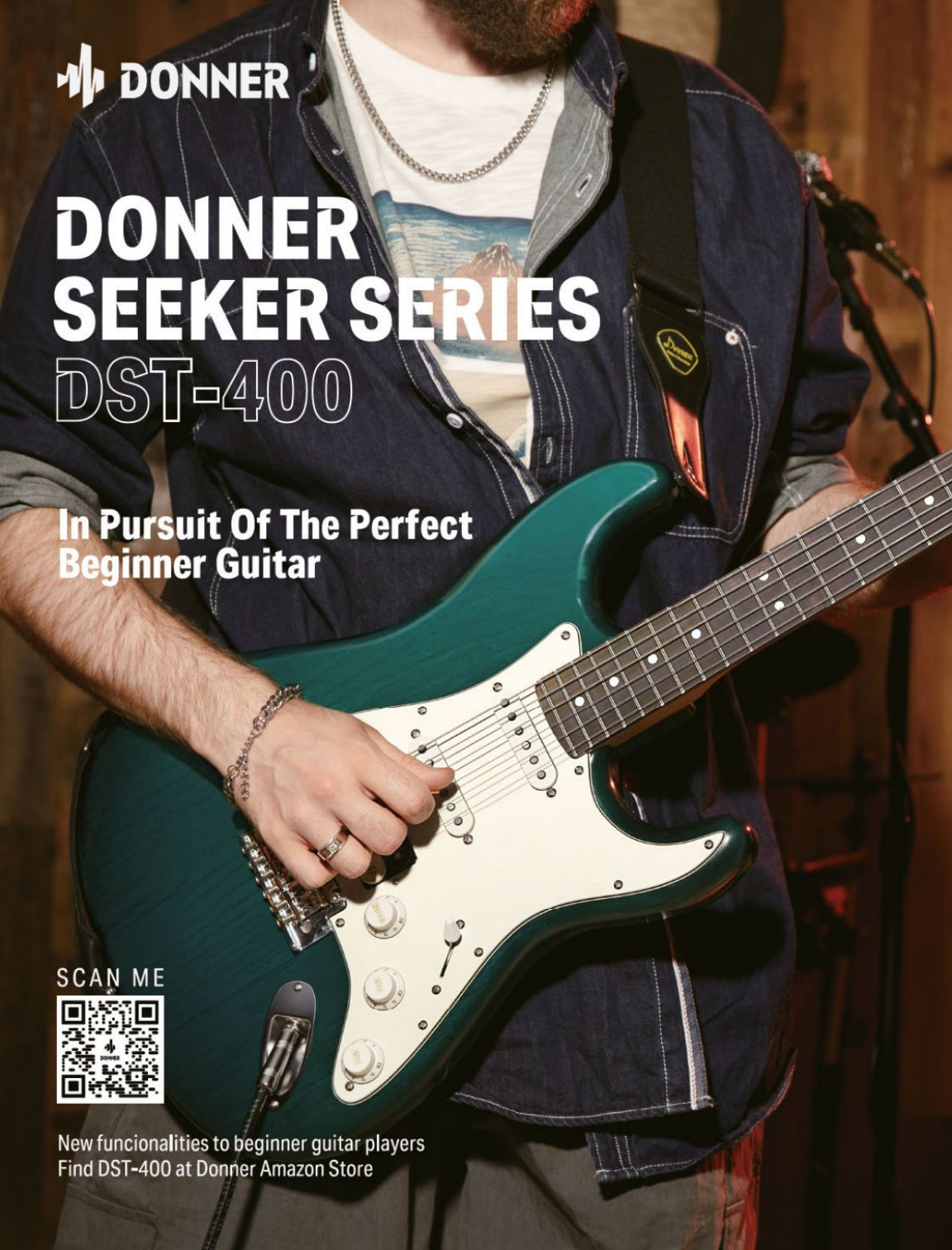
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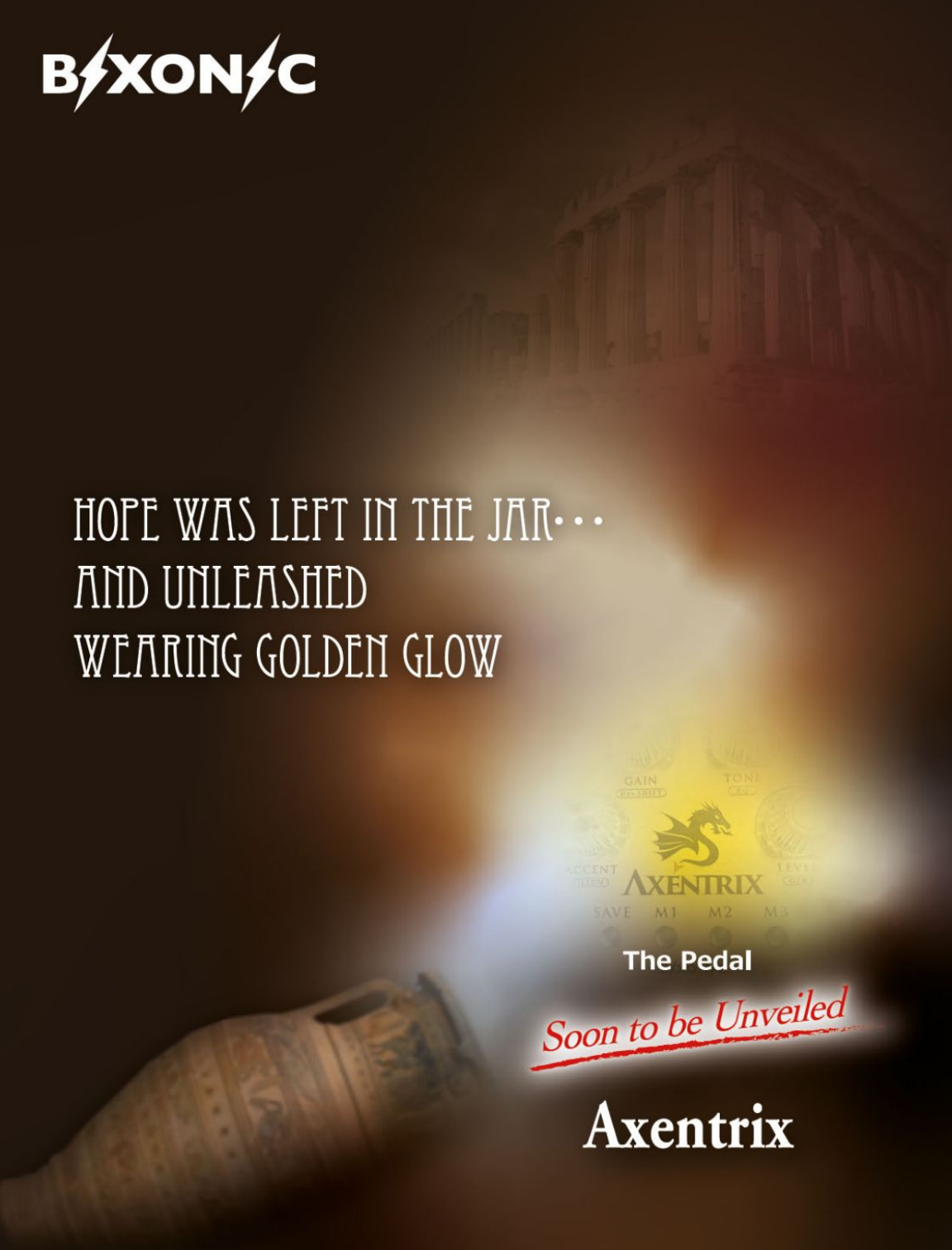

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TOUR OF DUTY

PRINT HAS FACED a major foe for the past two decades as digital media has come to dominate the mainstream. But 25 years ago, guitar magazines faced a peril equally as formidable: rap. As the urban contemporary genre became dominant in the late 1990s, guitar-based music faded from the airwaves for the first time since the British Invasion, which was itself a re-set after the brief lull that followed the late-'50s demise of rock and roll's first wave. I can still recall seeing the circulation figures in late February 1998 that showed declines of as much as 40 percent among some of the smaller guitar magazines that swam around the era's Big Three: *Guitar Player*, *Guitar World* and *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*. (Remarkably, I've worked at each of those titles.) The result was a culling that killed off *Guitar Shop*, *Maximum Guitar*, which I was then editing, and several other now-forgotten publications.

There were still plenty of guitar groups and artists, many of whom — like Limp Bizkit's Wes Borland and Korn's Munky and Head — filled the newly emerging nu-metal category, a fusion of metal and rap. But the heyday of virtuosos and shredders seemed long ago and faraway.

About the only thing that kept the light burning for guitar virtuosity in those years was G3, the annual guitar tour launched in 1996. It was a novel concept, bringing together a triumvirate of players on an annual basis to celebrate a level of electric guitar technical proficiency that dominated in the 1980s, before grunge stripped modern guitar rock of its feathers and frills. Over its years, G3 became a remarkable celebration of guitar virtuosity in all its many forms, encompassing shredders like Yngwie Malmsteen, John Petrucci, Paul Gilbert and Steve Morse, hard rockers such as Michael Schenker, Neal Schon and Brian May, new blues artists like Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and even country pickers like Johnny Hiland — not to mention such impossible-to-categorize players as Robert Fripp and Adrian Legg. And it was all due to one man: the tour's creator, Joe Satriani. Of course, he had a little help for his all-important inaugural run from two guitarists who shared his dream and vision: Steve Vai and Eric Johnson.

Remarkably, all three players have new albums out or on the launch pad, as well as highly anticipated support tours. Under the circumstances, we thought it was a great time not only to dig into Joe, Steve and Eric's new albums but also to have all three sit down to recall the first G3 tour and how it lit a torch that kept the spirit of virtuoso guitar playing alive while, remarkably, embracing music in all its many styles and forms. It was and remains a tremendous achievement, and one that's long overdue for another run.

Chris Scapelliti

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Jackson Maxwell Online and Social Media Managing Editor, jackson.maxwell@futurenet.com

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CONTENT
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Christopher Scapelliti, chris.scapelliti@futurenet.com
SENIOR EDITOR Art Thompson, arthur.thompson@futurenet.com
ART EDITOR Rosie Webber, rosie.webber@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION EDITOR Jem Roberts, jem.roberts@futurenet.com
LOS ANGELES EDITOR Jude Gold, judegold@gmail.com
FRETS SECTION EDITOR Jimmy Leslie, j@jimmyleslie.com
LESSONS EDITOR Jimmy Brown, jimmy.brown@futurenet.com
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ADVERTISING SALES
DIRECTOR OF U.S. MUSIC SALES Jonathan Brudner jonathan.brudner@futurenet.com, (845) 678-3064
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR Jason Perl jason.perl@futurenet.com, (646) 723-5419
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Robert Dye robert.dye@futurenet.com, (732) 241-7437

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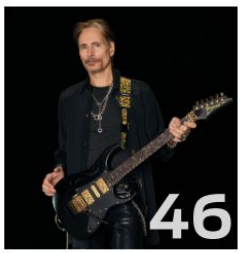

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ON THE COVER
Joe Satriani and Steve Vai, 2022, by Jen Rosenstein. Eric Johnson, 2022 by Max Crace

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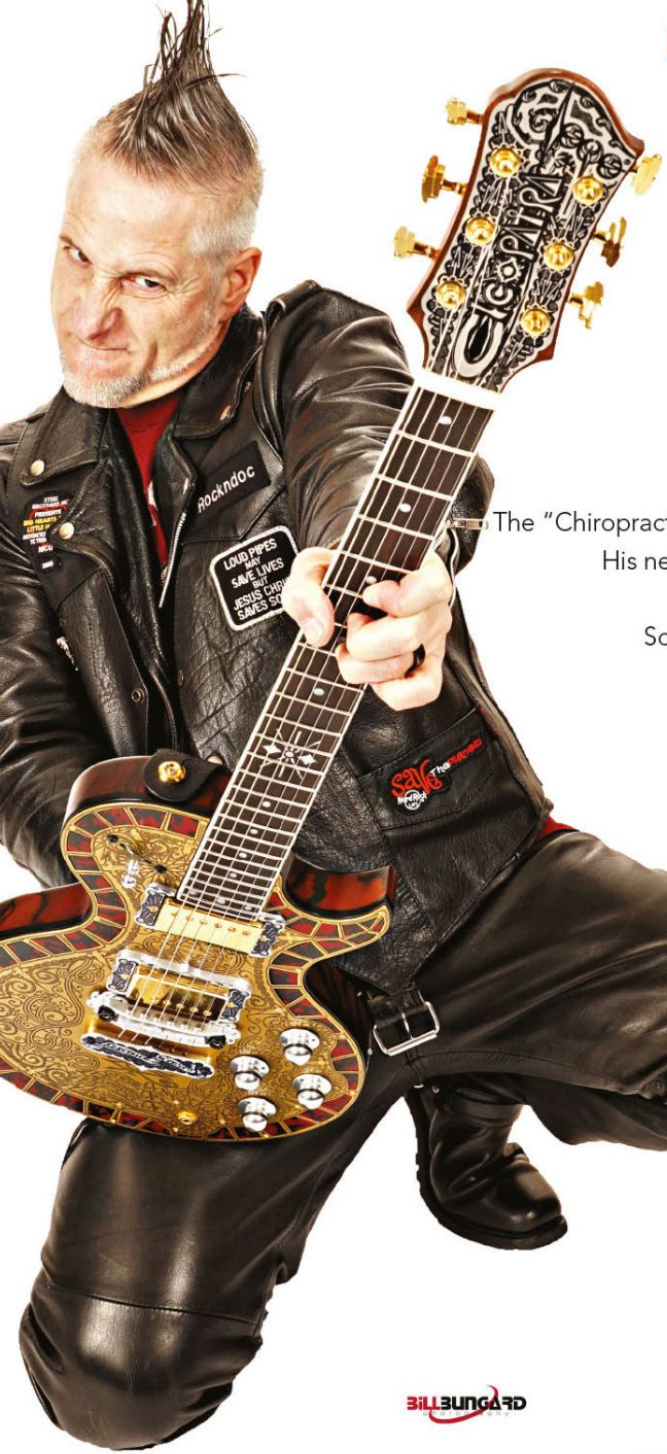

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RARE BIRD

Gibson's Murphy Lab pays tribute to Johnny Winter's well-traveled 1964 Firebird V with a flawless — and very limited — re-creation.

BY DAVE HUNTER

EONS AHEAD OF its time when introduced in 1963, Gibson's original Firebird has represented an iconic example of modernist guitar design ever since, remaining timeless and contemporary in equal measure. And from the time Johnny Winter started setting stages ablaze with this revolutionary electric in the late '60s, the blues legend has served as the key reference point for what this radically angular and eclectically appointed guitar can do. The Gibson Custom Shop has created the ultimate tribute to both the man and the instrument in the new Johnny Winter 1964 Firebird V, and it's a doozy of a guitar for anyone who has ever appreciated the equally unique look and voice of this classic.

The Johnny Winter 1964 Firebird V isn't merely a period-correct reissue of the original model; it's also a pinpoint-perfect re-creation of Winter's best-known '64 Firebird V, a guitar used for countless gigs and sessions, and which appears in all its glory on the cover of the album *Captured Live!* As such, the Gibson Custom Shop has fully replicated the holes in the body where the original Maestro vibrola was removed, the stop-bar tailpiece that replaced it, the missing reflector insert in the upper tone control knob, the faded Firebird logo on the pickguard, the splits in the wood where the original's jack was once repaired and more. The cosmetics are the skilled work of Gibson's Murphy Lab, which has added a myriad of dings, scuffs and scrapes to the well-aged Polaris White finish to bring the authenticity home. While only some 500 examples of the Firebird V were shipped in 1964, this Johnny Winter tribute is an even rarer bird, limited to 125 guitars.

The original Firebird was created by Ray Dietrich, the automotive designer responsible for the Duesenberg and other classic cars. Those built from 1963 to '65 get their "reverse-body" nickname from the fact that the horns on the upper bout and treble-side protrusion on the lower bout appear the reverse of those found on a traditional guitar of the era (some note a resemblance to a flipped-over Jazzmaster). The sleek lines continue in the six-to-a-side phoenix-head profile of the headstock, which used banjo tuners to avoid spoiling the esthetics.

Given the quirks of the original Firebird design, you can bet it's no easy guitar to re-create accurately, and Gibson's head of product development, Mat Koehler, concurs. "I will say that in the great catalog of Gibsons made over the past 128 years, the original

reverse-style Firebird is one of the most difficult to replicate," Koehler tells *GP*. "The nine-ply construction, the wings... It was clear that someone who was not a luthier designed that instrument. Ray Dietrich was a brilliant mind, but he did not make it easy on production," he says with a laugh. "That's actually why Gibson moved to the non-reverse Firebird in 1965. At the Custom Shop, we are making them exactly how they were made in Kalamazoo in '63, '64, so this Johnny Winter has exactly the same woods, exactly the same construction, and it's very, very true to his original."

The guitar comes with a certificate of authenticity (above) as well as a slide (top) and picks (opposite page).

As vaunted as the Custom Shop's reissue guitars have been for several years, Koehler tells us the step up to modern technology finally enabled Gibson to take the authenticity over the top, and it really shows here.

"For 2019, we totally revamped the entire range, including pickups and so forth, and that's when we took a deep dive into the Firebird, so we corrected a lot of the little issues," he reveals. "We've now got a 3-D scanner, and were lucky enough to get access to the original Johnny Winter guitar, so in a couple of hours we had a 3-D map of the entire guitar. And then over the period of a couple weeks we cleaned that up and created programs out of it, for CNC and otherwise, so we were able to capture that and get the exact dimensions. So when you hold this Johnny Winter model, you're holding the exact feel of the original, which is cool."

Out of the case and into the hands, this thing certainly delivers on the vintage-Firebird experience. I've said this before about the Murphy Lab work, but if a pal came along and said, "Hey, check out the '64 Firebird I just bought!" I would in no way doubt the veracity of the guitar upon popping open the gently aged rectangular case and lifting out this very instrument. Not only does the aging look right, it also feels right: the softness of the body edges and angles, the palm-gracing curve of the medium-C '64 neck profile and its comfortably rolled binding edges (another Murphy Lab "extra mile" detail that Koehler credits) — it all contributes to the time-machine experience this guitar delivers.

As Koehler indicated, the Firebird's uniqueness goes far deeper than its looks and

"THE ORIGINAL REVERSE-STYLE FIREBIRD IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT TO REPLICATE. IT WAS CLEAR THAT SOMEONE WHO WAS NOT A LUTHIER DESIGNED THAT INSTRUMENT"

includes a complex "through neck" constructed from a nine-ply mahogany and walnut core that forms both the neck and the center of the body, with solid mahogany wings attached to its sides to complete the shape, all perfectly rendered here. The neck is capped with a nicely dark Indian rosewood fingerboard edged in aged binding, with aged celluloid trapezoid inlays.

Equally significant to the original Firebird's revolutionary design was the bespoke set of pickups Gibson created for it. Often mistaken for a fully covered rendition of the mini-humbucker that would end up on the Gibson Les Paul Deluxe at the dawn of the '70s, it is in fact its own design, made with two hum-rejecting coils, each wound around its own Alnico bar magnet, which also takes the place of any pole pieces. Many past Firebird reissues have carried hotter ceramic-magnet pickups, but Gibson has gone the whole nine yards here to re-create the vintage-style units with Alnico magnets and lower-output windings, resulting in pickups of 6.77k ohms in the neck position and 6.83k ohms in the bridge. Controls are the traditional four-knob setup, with a three-way switch on the point of the lower horn.

In addition to the lightly aged rectangular hardshell case with "Johnny Winter" stenciled on the outside, the full package includes a certificate of authenticity, a print of legendary photographer Mick Rock's iconic shot of Winter in action, a slide and a handful of Johnny Winter Dunlop guitar picks.

Played unplugged, the Johnny Winter 1964 Firebird V is impressively resonant and lively, thanks no doubt to the veracity of the overall build, but likely aided by that stop-bar tailpiece modification, too. Amped up through a Friedman Dirty Shirley Mini with a 1x12 cab and a 1966 Fender Super Reverb 4x10 combo, and teamed up with a variety of overdrive pedals, the model's full promise paid off in spades. Firebirds are quirky beasts, for sure, and even when you love them, in theory you can still pick up a particular example and go, "Nah, not working for me!" This Johnny Winter homage, then, would be the polar opposite of that experience. Which is to say, yeah, very much working for me. In fact, I'd say this yielded the most satisfying Firebird-playing experience I've had since testing out a particularly nice vintage example from among a noted Firebird collector's favorites some 12 years ago or more.

Playability is superb, and even inspiring, and the tone is exactly what these unusual creations excel at. I suspect the accurately re-created Alnico pickups are helping a lot here, but either way, the guitar is characteristically bright without being the least bit harsh, as well as surprisingly thick and rich, with a hair of compression in the attack to make the legendary bite and sting sweetly musical. Getting the formula so right, as Gibson has here, also serves as a reminder of how versatile a great Firebird can be — diving smoothly into everything from hard rock to blues to indie to jangle and twang — and it could open the door to this kind of retro-modern style for countless players who never thought they'd get along with the design... or, to 124 of them at least, if we can find a way to forget to send back this limited-run sample. Well done, Gibson Custom Shop, on a fitting tribute to the Firebird master. By any measure, it's an outstanding guitar.

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Britt Daniel poses with his signature Fender Telecaster Thinline.

LONE STAR STATE OF MIND

Spoon's Britt Daniel reveals how ZZ Top and their native Austin, Texas inspired the group's 10th long-player, *Lucifer on the Sofa*.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

AFTER RECORDING SPOON'S previous few albums on the East and West coasts, guitarist, songwriter and frontman Britt Daniel decided it was time to head home to Austin, Texas, where he started the band with drummer Jim Eno three decades ago. The results were immediate. "The Hardest Cut," the first song written after the band returned to Texas, is the hardest-rocking tune in the Spoon catalog. Built on a boogie rhythm inspired by ZZ Top and a deceptively simple riff, and featuring a blistering solo from co-guitarist Gerardo Larios, "The Hardest Cut" set the tone for *Lucifer on the Sofa* (Matador).

Recorded at Eno's studio, the sessions were marked by spontaneity, as heard throughout the album. The final takes include pre-song noodling, and that's Daniel calling out section-change instructions to his bandmates in the middle of "Held," the muscular Smog cover that opens the album.

"We tried to track live whenever we could," Daniel says. "That was the sound we wanted. It's a real band playing. I don't know if that's *en vogue*, but that's what we wanted to do."

"A GOOD CHUNK OF WRITING A SONG IS KNOWING WHAT THAT RHYTHM IS GOING TO BE — THAT FEEL"

Daniel shares guitar duties with Larios and multi-instrumentalist Alex Fischel, who rip the dueling guitar solos on "Satellite," but Daniel's right hand is the secret to the Spoon sound. Somehow both tightly wound and loose at once, Daniel sculpts the album's hard-rocking, post-punk riffs and soulful segues with precision, always in lockstep with Eno. *Lucifer on the Sofa* is a raw rock and roll record made by guys who grew up worshipping artists like Prince and PJ Harvey.

"PJ Harvey was the sound," he admits. "When we were starting out, that was it. She had just put out *Rid of Me* and that was the sound I was going for, for sure."

Daniel joined us to talk through the influences and gear — including his signature Fender Telecaster Thinline — he used to shape *Lucifer on the Sofa*.

Spoon had been a West Coast band for a decade. How did moving back to Austin influence *Lucifer on the Sofa*?

It was a reaction to how we made the last few records. I made a lot of [*2010's*] *Transference* alone at home in Portland because I finally had a studio of my own in my house. And I learned that I could do that, but it wasn't as

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much fun as recording with other people. We wanted to make a record in Austin because we could do it at our own pace. But more than that, it's a town where there's a lot going on. You can go out and see Dale Watson, come back home and write a song that takes some of that energy, or go see bands at the Hotel Vegas and use that kind of energy.

Your specialty is memorable, single-note riffs instead of chords. How did your style develop?

For me, it's about establishing a rhythm and a feel with my right hand and knowing there's usually going to be someone who can do something more technical as a lead. But for me, it's the rhythm. That's just what I'm good at. A good chunk of writing a song is knowing what that rhythm is going to be — that feel.

You've stayed in that ballpark, but Spoon's sound has mushroomed around it.

It's a rhythmic style. It's not super technical. The way I started playing was I got a Beatles songbook, because I knew most Beatles songs. I would just sit there with that songbook and learn chord after chord. I would learn a lot of Led Zeppelin songs, too, but I was not interested in the solos as much as what he was playing on those acoustic parts or the main riffs. I learned the entire "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You," that picking style, just from getting a record and backing the needle up, over and over again, as I listened for what was going on with each string he was playing. That takes a long time, but I had nothing but time when I was 16.

"The Hardest Cut" was the first tune written when the band reconvened in Austin. What do you think was inspiring you then?

We had just gotten off the road. I came in to Austin, and then Alex came in behind me, drove in from California. But I saw ZZ Top for the first time in 2019. I'd had some records when I was a kid, but I'd never done a deep dive. And I went deep after I saw them. Then I saw their documentary [*2019's* ZZ Top: That Little Ol' Band from Texas], and that was just another thing that made me invest a lot of time in learning a lot more about their catalog.

The creamy overdrive tone after the chorus really pops out. What did you use to get that?

Yeah, the gnarly part. I don't even remember. I think it just came to me, and it's funny that part gets singled out a lot when I'm talking to people, not only reviewers but also fans or friends. For me, it was always the part where the drums dropped out. That was all it was. But, yeah, I guess it does something kind of cool.

Did you go in any directions with gear that you normally wouldn't?

We think about it a lot, especially when we're doing overdubs. If we're tracking live, we're usually just going to track with whatever we happen to be playing as we're setting up. But I used my own Fender Telecaster Thinline a lot on this record, and, funny enough, I used a tiny Vox Pathfinder as the main guitar amp. Every now and then I'd use something bigger, but there was something about the sound of that amp. It somehow replicates that AC30 British Invasion tone with just this one little speaker.

Fender debuted your signature Thinline Tele in 2019. What's different about your model?

I had been playing Thinlines for a long time, so when they asked me to design one, I came up with a combo of the best parts of the few that I already had, in terms of not only its looks but also its sound. I went through tons of pickups until I found something that had this sort of snarl and bite. The thing I really like about Thinlines is you get that sound even more than on a regular Telecaster. You get even more of that sort of scraping sound of the pick hitting the strings. And for a guitar player like me, who's all about the right hand, that's a big bonus. It's just another degree of being expressive with my right hand.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Lucifer on the Sofa

"The Hardest Cut," "Wild," "Feels Alright," "Held," "The Devil & Mister Jones"

VAPOR TRAILS

Nearly 40 years on, Dave Rusan's visionary Cloud guitar is a lasting presence in the gear world firmament.

BY ART THOMPSON

IN THE WORLD of instantly recognizable custom guitars, perhaps none stands out more than the aptly named Cloud that Prince played in the final scenes of the 1984 film *Purple Rain*. Luthier Dave Rusan designed and built the Cloud, with its whimsical curves and distinctive prong on the upper bout. Rusan grew up in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, and became interested playing guitar as teenager. He says he didn't think of it as just a musical instrument, however, but as a beautiful and mysterious machine.

"Soon after my dad bought me my second guitar, a Mosrite, I took off the neck and removed the pickguard to see what was going on inside," he recounts to *Guitar Player*. "I started modifying my guitars, but with almost no books to refer to, my efforts were based largely on trial and error. I improved, though, and was soon working on my friend's guitars. I felt I'd reached a major milestone when I finished my first re-fret."

Rusan was playing in "decent" bands in the Saint Cloud area, but, seeking to expand his horizons, he moved to Minneapolis to pursue the music scene there. "I found better musicians to work with and played all the major clubs," he says. "I had the opportunity to do session work at Sound 80, where Bob Dylan and Cat Stevens would do some recording. I also wanted to continue to pursue a career in guitar repair and started contacting music stores in the Minneapolis area. However, the owners of these stores were almost all at least a generation older than their customers, who played in rock bands. They had been in business for years, going back at least to the craze for accordions that had been engendered by *The Lawrence Welk Show* in the 1950s. It was like being in a store owned by your unhip uncle."

There was one music store that was cool, however, and it changed Rusan's life.

"Knut-Koupee Music was owned by two guys in their 20s who also played in bands, and it was a fun store and a hangout for rock musicians," he explains. "I offered to start a repair shop in the basement, which they

Prince onstage with a Cloud guitar in 1984 during his *Purple Rain* tour

agreed to, and I soon was working on the guitars of the hippest bands in town, including the Replacements, Hüsker Dü and the Suburbs. There was also a young kid, still in high school, who frequently came to the store and was rumored to be super-talented. One day he demonstrated it by riffing on a keyboard with his right hand while hammering a harmony part on a guitar with his left hand.

"About a year later, I heard an even more impressive demonstration when David Z [*a.k.a. David Rivkin*], a local recording engineer and producer, played a recording on a boom box that he put on the counter. I remember saying, 'Wow, David, it looks like you discovered the next Earth, Wind and Fire!' He replied, 'Nope, it's all played by that kid with the Afro who always hangs out here.' The demo I heard that day got Prince a recording contract, and he was on the rise."

How did you begin working with Prince?

I did some setups and modifications to his Gibson L6S, as well as to an unusual custom bass guitar he'd bought in New York City. But then I got an opportunity to take a sabbatical from my position at Knut-Koupee and work at a store in the U.K. This was a dream come true, because it was a shop where many major British acts took their instruments for repair. I was soon working on guitars that belonged to the Rolling Stones, the Who and Def Leppard, and I got to spend some time with Gary Moore, Greg Lake and even Randy Rhoads.

Soon after I resumed my job at Knut-Koupee, I saw Prince at the counter talking to one of the owners, Jeff Hill. He told me Prince was going to star in a movie and he needed to have a custom guitar built that would be part of the plot. But it would have to be done quickly, since the movie was already in production. Although by that time I was a competent repairman, I knew that guitar building is quite a different skill and different tools would be needed to accomplish the

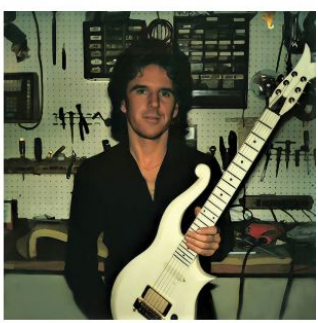
Dave Rusan holds a white Cloud guitar. (below) Rusan in the 1980s with one of the original Cloud guitars.

"PRINCE SAID HE WANTED IT TO BE WHITE, WITH GOLD HARDWARE AND EMG PICKUPS. OTHERWISE I WAS ON MY OWN"

task. I contemplated declining the project, but I thought if I didn't give it a shot, I'd always regret it, so I accepted the challenge.

Did Prince tell you how he wanted the guitar to look?

His instructions were sketchy at best. At the time he often seemed painfully shy and talked as little as possible. He wanted design elements of his custom bass, such as the long horn, incorporated into this custom build, so I used that as my initial inspiration. He said he wanted it to be white, with gold hardware, and



he must have already had some experience with EMG pickups, since he requested them. Otherwise, I was on my own, and all the decisions — such as neck size and shape, fret size and the myriad other things I would have wanted to discuss with him — were left for me to decide. I felt that the best plan was to

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (PRINCE); ALL OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVE RUSAN

make a guitar I would enjoy playing and hope that we both had the same taste.

I spent a lot of time making a step-by-step plan so that I wouldn't become overwhelmed by the task. Although I had already carved necks, I decided to use a neck from an unfinished guitar that was in the shop and shaped the headstock to my plans. I decided to make the body of hard-rock maple, because it wasn't going to be a large guitar that could get heavy, and the hardness of that wood could help it survive the abuse that Prince often inflicted on his stage guitars. Schaller hardware was top of the line at that time, so I used their bridge and tuners.

Were there any particular problems you had to overcome during the build?

The shop was poorly equipped for guitar building. There were a few items — such as a drill press, a band saw and a router — but none of the smaller specialized tools needed for this job, like chisels, a palm sander and a Foredom rotary tool. The body carving was quite a task. There have been very few guitars with such a complicated shape, and I had to bring it to life with a Dremel tool and sanding drums powered by a hand drill. I also had a belt sander that had been mounted on its side, which proved to be quite helpful. I really threw myself into the project, working six days a week for over a month.

Rusan with a Cloud guitar and a custom clear-bodied guitar built for Prince guitarist Wendy Melvoin featuring silk flowers in a slab of clear Lucite and a Rickenbacker neck converted to a bolt-on. "Wendy thought it was too heavy and returned it to the store," Rusan says. It now resides in the Hard Rock Cafe Museum.

Then, Tommy Stinson [*not the onetime Replacements bassist*], who mostly did finishing in the shop, took over to paint it. Nitrocellulose lacquer was used, which caused some problems, since the shape was hard to spray evenly, and clear buildup in certain areas caused the white to look a bit yellow, especially around the horn. When the finishing was done, I took over, removing the lacquer from the frets, installing the hardware and electronics and doing the final setup.

How did Prince react when he saw it?

He liked it a lot and used it in the movie's most important final scene. Prince seemed to enjoy playing the guitar, because he requested two more Clouds for the tour. I later made a fourth one that was given away in London by Warner Records in conjunction with a music-store chain.

Has your business changed over the years and are you still a one-man operation?

I still make these guitars by myself in my workshop. They're demanding to build for a solid-body instrument, but carving wood into a graceful shape is rewarding, and customers always tell me how much they appreciate them. The demand really picked up after Prince passed away, and I feel my work helps honor his memory. I've sent them all over the world, and my goals now are to achieve the highest level of attention to detail and playability I can muster, while keeping them true as possible to the originals. It hasn't been easy, because some of the products have changed or disappeared, but after almost 40 years I can still find a way to make it happen.

For example, the Schaller bridge I originally used was discontinued six years ago, so I have friends in Europe and Japan looking for new-old-stock ones. EMG changed the style of their logo about two years ago, so I had to have a special run commissioned, with the old logo printed on the pickups. Schaller also changed the logo on their tuners. Luckily, I found a guy on Reverb who had 50 new sets that he'd stored for 20 years, and I bought them all.

Have you updated anything?

One significant change I've made to the Clouds is the way that I install the frets. On the first one or two, I fretted them before the finish went on, which is common with painted fingerboards. This method requires removing the finish from the frets, and it can be difficult to make it look good when the fingerboard surface is a solid color rather than just clear coats. The height of the frets is also diminished by the buildup of the paint between them. I made at least one for Prince in which I installed the frets over tiny strips of veneer to add to their height. That worked pretty well but was quite labor intensive.

A few years ago I came up with a new method that, to my knowledge, has never been done: I fret the guitar before the finishing is done and bevel and shape the ends of the frets. Then I remove them and polish the ends. After finishing, I clean out the fret slots, reinstall the frets and do the leveling, being careful to center them on the fingerboard and not mar the polished ends. When I'm done, I have frets that look their best and have smooth, slightly recessed ends due to the extra thickness of the paint. It's clearly an improvement over every other method that I've tried. But I don't tell customers about this unless they ask, since some might prefer the method I used on the first guitars, even though the results were inferior.

"DEMAND REALLY PICKED UP AFTER PRINCE PASSED AWAY, AND I FEEL MY WORK HELPS HONOR HIS MEMORY"

Kenny Greenberg in his studio with a 1959 Gretsch. "I think it's a Country Club," he says. "They took the finish off and repaired the headstock long before I got the guitar, so all that info is gone. It's kind of a mutt, but I love it. It's been on a lot of records."

SLIDING INTO AFRICA

Kenny Greenberg goes back to the roots of the blues for his first solo record.

BY MICHAEL ROSS

AFTER DECADES OF WORKING with artists like the Mavericks, Bob Seger, Kenny Chesney, Willie Nelson, Buddy Guy and Taylor Swift, 2012 ACM Guitarist of the Year Kenny Greenberg has released a record of his own, *Blues for Arash* (We R They Records). But we would still be waiting had not screenwriter Arash Amel requested music for a prospective film about a blues fanatic from West Africa. "He was looking for a combination of African rhythms and American blues," Greenberg says. "Slide guitar and some cinematic stuff."

Greenberg ensconced himself in his home studio and began recording. For the West African flavors, the guitarist had invaluable help from Justin Adams of Robert Plant's Sensational Shape Shifters, but the blues is all courtesy of the Nashville session ace. Some of the aforementioned slide was played on a Gibson SG with minihumbuckers, but for the bulk of the record he used the more unusual DiPinto Galaxie.

"I was buying a compressor and the guy said, 'I'll throw in this guitar,'" Greenberg says, with a laugh. "I put on big strings and love it for playing slide. I ran a '90s Fender Pro Jr. into a 4x12 cabinet that I close- and distance-miked. I had an overdrive pedal on, just to get a little more gain from the amp."

For the acoustic blues parts, the guitarist used a wooden National resonator guitar and a Harmony Sovereign. With each, he combined direct pickup and miked tracks. Electric rhythms were courtesy of his Strat through a Jeff Heim custom amp.

The music's spirit is best embodied in the track "Nairobi Blues." "That's my favorite thing on the record," Greenberg reveals. "Justin sent me files of Juldeh Camara playing the one-string Gambian fiddle. We flipped the beat around and added this acoustic hill country blues on top."

Greenberg recorded most of the record working alone, yet his playing retains a live energy that makes the tracks pop. "I try to turn my mind off and just play," he explains. "I'm fortunate to have this great home facility here, where I can play as long as I want. I loop the song, get a cup of coffee, stand in front of the speakers and try to not think too much. That's when the good stuff comes."

Once it became clear that the movie wasn't going to get made, the music was released to the guitarist to use as he wished. "Rather than have it sit in obscurity, I thought I would just put it out," Greenberg says. "I mean, why not?"

Eric Gales with his signature Magneto Sonnet RawDawg II

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

With nearly 20 albums to his name, Eric Gales says these five tracks tell you the most about his journey.

BY MARK McSTEA

ERIC GALES EXPLODED onto the music scene at the age of 16 with his 1991 debut album, *The Eric Gales Band*. Inevitably, as with any Black blues guitarist adding a little rock to the mix, the "next Hendrix" tag was duly applied. Indeed, it did seem Gales was channeling a strong Hendrix vibe, not only by the way he played but also in how he looked. A clip on YouTube shows him winning a local battle of the bands contest in 1989, at the age of 14, with an incendiary rendition of "Spanish Castle Magic." Featuring his brother Eugene on bass and vocals, the performance showcases a staggeringly gifted guitarist, able to peel off face-melting Hendrix licks with ease. Likewise, Gales' first appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show*, in 1991, plugging "Sign of the Storm," from his debut album, had all the swagger of classic SRV at his best.

Gales started to learn guitar at the age of four, and, by his own admission, it came fairly easily for him. "It felt very natural," he tells *Guitar Player*. "Actually, every musical instrument I've played has always felt right. I believe this was something that was cast in my life before I ever started to play." Although right-handed, he plays left-handed on a right-handed guitar, with the bass strings at the bottom. Taught by his older brother Manuel — a lefty playing an "upside-down" axe, who achieved success under the name Little Jimmy King — Gales never questioned how he was taught. Manuel introduced him to a whole world of great guitar music, not only the obvious blues legends but also classic rock, from the likes of Led Zeppelin and Frank Marino to mavericks like Eric Johnson, as well as the jazz styles of Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery. While absorbing this rich guitar gumbo, Gales was infusing the mix with the urban sounds of rap and hip-hop he heard on the radio. The result was an artist who transcended his own influences to become a significant inspiration to those who followed in his wake.

Like many musical artists, Gales has had struggles with addiction issues, and he spent 21 months in prison from 2009 for breaking probation rules after a drug conviction. He wasn't even allowed to play guitar until a warden realized who he was and managed to provide him with an instrument. The guard also persuaded Gales to form a band while inside, to help with the rehabilitation process. "Toward the end of my sentence, we got to play quite a few shows, festivals and things like that, which made things a lot easier to

OLLY CURTIS

With Joe Bonamassa at Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea, August 19, 2019

bear," Gales explains. The guitarist is upbeat about the outcome from his experience, and feels that his personal development during that time — specifically his ability to reflect and resolve to change — was essential to breaking the chains of addiction. "God gave me a gift, and I think I lost my way for a time," he says. "But I'm back on track and grateful for all the opportunities that a life in music has given me."

Having recorded 21 albums and appeared as a guest on considerably more, Gales — whose main guitar is his custom Magneto Sonnet RawDawg II — has a broad catalog to draw upon when selecting five key songs from his career. Perhaps surprisingly, four of the tracks chosen are drawn from his last two albums, 2017's *Middle of the Road* and 2019's *Bookends*, both of which were recorded since he resolved his substance abuse problems. They are, in Gales' opinion, the best music he has made in his career, topped only by his most recent release, 2021's *Crown*.

Gales is understandably enthusiastic about the new album, given that it encompasses everything we've come to expect from him, while it shows him taking his music to a new level. A key highlight for many will be his guitar duel with Joe Bonamassa on "I Want My Crown." Bonamassa produced the record with Josh Smith and was determined to help Gales realize the vision that he had for the project. Consequently, there are strong statement pieces, humorous nods to the trials of Gales' own life and three short instrumental vignettes that call to mind elements of Hendrix. Gales is fired up and ready to make sure there are no further setbacks on his path to musical redemption. "I'm hungrier than I've ever been, man," he tells *Guitar Player*. "I love the process of touring and recording, and I can't wait for people to hear what I'm going to be coming up with in the future."

Posing for a portrait in New York City in the early 1990s

CATHERINE McGANN/GETTY IMAGES (1980S); JOBY SESSIONS (LIVE)

"GOD GAVE ME A GIFT, AND I THINK I LOST MY WAY FOR A TIME. BUT I'M BACK ON TRACK"

As for his selections for this list, he says, "A couple of these songs are pretty long, but I like to be able to stretch out and make a strong statement. Probably out of 10 songs on an album, I'll usually have a couple that are on the longer side. Sometimes the spirit wants to go long, so you have to allow that to happen."

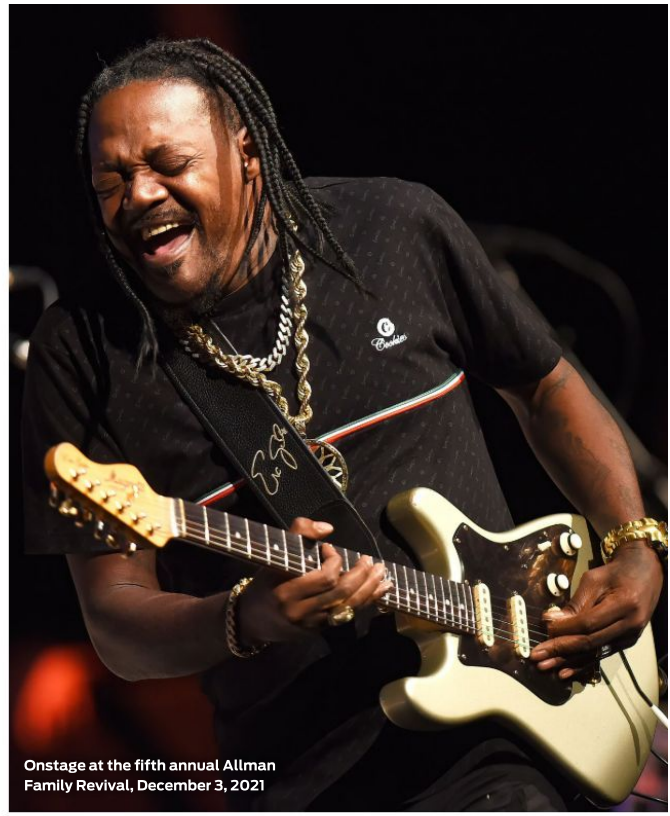
"FREEDOM FROM MY DEMONS" *CRYSTAL VISION* (2006)

"This is the oldest song I picked for the five, and also the most traditional in style. It's a really strong pointer to my sobriety. For a few years I wasn't really listening to my own lyrics, but then I went back to it after a long time and I thought it was great to see the way that the ideas applied to me now, being nearly six years clean. I think this is a deep song with beautiful lyrics. And come on, who doesn't like the blues? I believe this track needed to be pulled out for this list. The real Superstrat tone was actually a Magneto going through a Fender Tweed Bassman and a Tube Screamer. I think I achieved a magnificent tone with that setup. I guess there is a hint of Stevie Ray Vaughan's version of 'Texas Flood' about the song. I was aiming for that sort of vibe and aura."

"BOOGIE MAN" *MIDDLE OF THE ROAD* (2017)

"This is one of three songs I chose from *Middle of the Road*, which I feel is really one of my strongest albums. I have had a long history of being known as the 'bad guy,' you know? What with being arrested, going to prison, drug addiction and everything, I thought 'Boogie Man' was a great representation of this statement that I had been labeled with.

"'Boogie Man' was originally a Freddie King song, and I love that lyrical idea that goes right back to Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Bo Diddley — that real braggadocio approach. It takes me back to those blues roots. I think it tells a story that I can relate to with my rep. There's a lot of humor in songs like this, which people don't often realize. These guys mean it, but they're not taking themselves too seriously. Gary Clark Jr. contributes some great guitar and vocals as well on this one. I like working with guests. When the chemistry is right, you can make magic happen, you know?



Onstage at the fifth annual Allman Family Revival, December 3, 2021

You can inspire and fire each other up. Guitar-wise, it is definitely the Magneto on this song. They're a great company, their guitars play great, and it's become my go-to guitar for whatever I want."

"HELP ME LET GO" *MIDDLE OF THE ROAD* (2017)

"I play acoustic on this one; I think it was a Paul Reed Smith acoustic. And I guess what I like about this song is that it goes against the grain of what people know me for or expect to hear from me. I think that difference helps it to really catch the listener's ear by making a very different stylistic statement. It encapsulates the beautiful relationship that I feel that I have with the acoustic guitar. I do really love to play acoustic things. I think you can get a very warm, expressive tone that enables you to make a statement with your music.

"This song was written while I was in rehab in 2016, and I think the message in the lyrics is just as applicable today, for me or anybody. There are some times and some things that you just have to let go of. It meant so much to me to be able to put a song on the record that described my journey, the route that I had to take through life at that time. I suppose it is also a little different because there is so little guitar on the track. I really just tried to say what needed to be said without overplaying. I think it's important to have the self-knowledge to know when to play, and when to sit back and let the song speak. Just a little touch here and there, then get out of the way. [*laughs*] Sometimes less is more, and sometimes you want to really let loose. It's all about how to serve the song in the end."

"I'VE BEEN DECEIVED" *MIDDLE OF THE ROAD* (2017)

"There's a very powerful drive to this track. The lyrics are about me having a conversation about being deceived by drugs. The drugs were friends with me at the beginning, but the whole time it was a big deception.

"Musically, I would say that this is a great example of where I've tried to take the blues to a different place. There's some classic-rock stylings, obviously some blues, and elements of urban music and R&B. I think that combination of influences is what maybe makes my music stand out, and what gives me my own signature. I have influences from so many different areas and I try to incorporate all of them into my music. What made an impact on me as a listener is what has inspired me to try to re-create in my own music. I think it's important to let your influences filter into your music, but also, maybe even more importantly, to use them to make something new that is your own. I always want to acknowledge those who went before me though, in so many fields, not just blues. Who knows? Maybe what I do will influence someone else and so on, as music gets passed on."

"HOW WE TURN OUR INFLUENCES INTO OUR OWN STYLE IS WHAT WE BRING TO THE TABLE AS MUSICIANS"

"SOUTHPAW SERENADE" *THE BOOKENDS* (2019)

"This song is a testament to the way I play, and it's a reflection on a lot of things that happened to me in my personal life. I guess I thought, Why not do a song about playing left-handed? [*laughs*] Doyle Bramhall II appears on this track. He's someone I've been friends with for nearly 30 years, and he's a southpaw too, so it seemed like a natural fit.

"I really like the tone of my guitar on this song. It's very warm and creamy. I used my Magneto with a wah pedal, a delay and a distortion unit. I forget what brands they were, but there was nothing fancy — just standard kinds of things. I think the sound that I get is really about who I am, and the way that I play. I suppose what I'm saying is that I sound pretty much like me whatever I play through, which is what we're all trying to achieve in the end. We all have different guys that influence us, but how we turn those influences into our own style, our own statement or whatever, is what we bring to the table as musicians." ▮

PAUL HENNESSY/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

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Leo's Lion

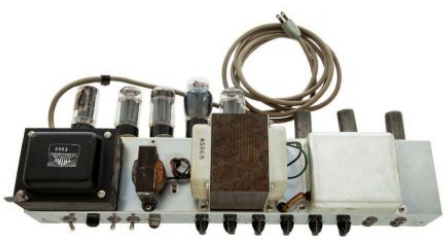
With circuit advances and 12 on the dial, the 1958 Fender Twin-Amp was the world's most formidable roaring guitar combo.

ALTHOUGH A TWIN by name when it first arrived in 1952 with two 12-inch speakers, Fender's would-be flagship amp wasn't a Twin by nature until 1958, when Leo Fender and company massively increased its output power to achieve the outsized wattage-to-size ratio that the model has boasted ever since. Come the 5F8 and 5F8-A update of 1958, Fender was showing the world the future of the professional amplifier for the big stage, and stepping up to a whole new level of performance — which is saying something for a company that was already setting the standards for high-quality guitar amps.

The 4x10 5F6-A Bassman combo gets a lot of plaudits for "best guitar amp ever," and for inspiring some of the other best guitar amps ever: the Marshall JTM45 and the Plexi models that followed, as well as countless others from the past 60-plus years. However, the 5F8-A Twin was really kind of like a JTM45/100 in a 2x12 combo, and just a few ticks away from being a 100-watt "Plexi" Super Lead at that. It had all of Fender's next-level thinking packed into a design that was only equaled in some respects by the 5F6-A Bassman, except that the Twin — boasting around 85 watts — also had twice the power. It would be several years before amps from other major manufacturers would reach similar power levels.

Fender released the first Twin Amp, model 5C8, in a so-called wide-panel tweed cabinet in 1952. Like many of the company's other dual-6L6 amps of the early '50s, it put out only about 25 watts, but it was a big amp for its day and got the ball rolling toward an industry standard. By the latter mid '50s, the 5E8-A Twin delivered 35 to 40 watts in its updated narrow-panel cabinet, with features akin to the 1x15 Pro, 2x10 Super and 3x10 Bandmaster, although it boasted a slightly larger output transformer for a gutsier sonic delivery, and a few inexplicable differences in the preamp. The reason these amps are often seen as second-tier to the Bassman, however, is that they employed several elements that made them a little less robust sonically. All shared the split-load phase inverter configuration, which was less efficient and more prone to distortion than the long-tailed pair used in the Bassman, and none had the Bassman's middle control, among a few other things. The high-powered Twin of 1958 changed all that by taking on these circuit advances, and in doing so it arguably became the world's most formidable guitar amp.

The '58 Twin arrived first as the model 5F8, which was fairly quickly tweaked into the 5F8-A. Relatively minor changes between the two included different values and configurations of grid resistors on the output tubes, a move toward a more conventional presence control that was no longer tied to the middle control, and a more reliable GZ34 rectifier tube (similar changes were made from 5F6 to 5F6-A Bassman). In the Twin, Fender was also reaching the point of maximum capacity for what could be squeezed into the relatively compact tweed-era chassis that the maker used. The power transformer — bolted to the back of



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Approx. 85 watts from four 5881/6L6GC output tubes
- One 12AY7 and two 12AX7 preamp tubes
- Bright and Normal channels with volume on each; shared treble, bass, middle and presence controls
- Cathode-follower tone stack
- Two 12" Jensen P12N Alnico speakers
- Finger-jointed pine cabinet covered in diagonal-striped tweed cloth

IMAGED BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS, HA.COM

BY DAVE HUNTER

this long, rectangular steel box — was an enormous chunk of iron. The output transformer was even bigger — and there was a lot to cram inside the thing, too.

The two Jensen P12N speakers mounted in the open-back combo cabinet play a big part in the Twin's sonic splendor, but they were barely up to the amp's full fury, and certainly unequal to it with the volume fully wound up to a roaring tweed-era 12 on the dial. These were among Jensen's sturdiest speakers of the day, and while ratings vary, they were generally about 30 watts RMS in the late '50s (the current P12N reissues are rated at 50 watts apiece). You don't have to be a mathematician to figure out that won't cut it with the amp cranked.

Why the inadequate drivers? For one thing, these were among the highest-rated speakers available at the time — at least before Fender moved over to JBL speakers to handle the Showman's massive power in 1961–'62 — and delivered an acceptable performance while ensuring a bottom line that Fender could tolerate. For another, amp makers of the day were moving to higher-wattage amp designs to ensure more headroom earlier in the volume range. They didn't really expect guitarists to throw the full 85 watts into the game. Unsurprisingly, many amps have survived beyond the lifespan of their original speakers, or have been reconed, at the very least.

A number of big guns have turned to the glories of the high-powered Twin of 1958–'60 for their tonal needs. Keith Richards owns several and has toured with multiple examples for several years, and Eric Clapton has often used one (and reproductions thereof, in addition to also using the earlier 40-watt iteration). Joe Bonamassa added a pair of vintage high-powered Twins to his rig in 2014, and Fender reissued the 5F8-A in 2018 as the '59 Twin JB Edition. "I plugged in a Les Paul," he says of first hooking up his dual-HP Twin-loaded rig, "and we were just like, 'Wow, that is just optimized sound!' Then we plug the Strat in, and, 'Well, if that ain't the best Strat tone I've achieved in a while!' And then the Tele, and the 335, and you go, 'There's your sound!'"

"I PLUGGED IN A LES PAUL, AND WE WERE JUST LIKE, 'WOW, THAT IS JUST OPTIMIZED SOUND!'"
— JOE BONAMASSA

Acquiring the real thing has gotten harder and harder for your average workaday guitarist. Original 1958–'60 tweed Twins have been rare at the best of times, and now good examples are pushing $20,000 on the vintage market. Fortunately, Fender's JB reissue and other reproductions can get players close to the mighty potential of a raging 85-watt amp stuffed into a pine box with two 12-inch speakers — which is something every guitarist should experience at least once in life.

David Gilmour is another Fender Twin fan, as seen by his well-worn 1958 model.

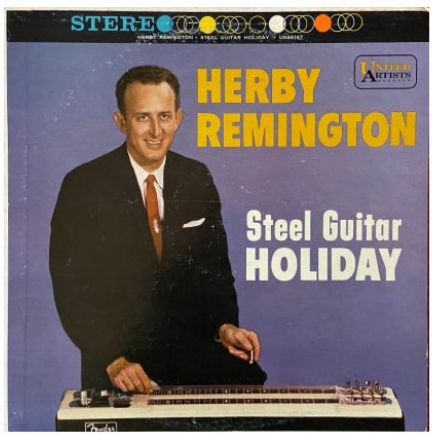
JOBY SESSIONS

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

How to Hit the Reset Button

Herby Remington's *Steel Guitar Holiday* is a high-octane palate cleanser.

ONE SUNDAY IN January 2022, I watched football for about nine hours straight. The games were fantastic, full of exciting finishes that made for great live television. That said, I was forced to watch dozens of commercials. I saw folks meet their romantic soulmates, only to suddenly leave...to get a burrito by themselves. I saw a twosome negotiating who could dip their deep-fried piece of meat into a "cheese" sauce. Mostly, though, I saw dozens of commercials for NFL betting. Hey, why not *bet it all* on the 49ers to win the the Super Bowl? It's "risk free"! After binge-watching football commercials all day, I began to wonder, What exactly are our priorities? And what's really "good"? Folks, all this TV watching required a turbo-charged high-octane palate cleanser.



Well, kind readers, I found what I needed on Herby Remington's *Steel Guitar Holiday*! There are many great records I put on for a single listen, but *Steel Guitar Holiday* beckons for repeat playings...unlike, say, side two of *Abbey Road*, a masterpiece that nevertheless leaves me full after one listen.

Despite having an apartment full of LPs, I might happily listen to one record for weeks, and *Steel Guitar Holiday* is the kind of album I'll play and play and play. It fills my heart with something beneficial to my own kindliness. It's nourishing, abounds with good melodies and joyous teamwork, and is filled with sounds that magnetize my soul. It's played by master craftsmen who prioritize a people-pleasing aesthetic that, unfortunately, seems long lost. *Steel Guitar Holiday* lives up to its name and delivers an escape to wholesome goodness. It's something positive to binge on.

Originally released as *Herby Remington Plays the Steel*, by "D" Records in 1959, the album was reissued by United Artists in 1961 in the guise we celebrate here. It features a stellar cast that includes the jaw-dropping Paul Buskirk on guitar, Clyde Brewer on piano and fiddle, Darrell Raley on fiddle and sax, and the swinging rhythm section of bassist Dean Reynolds and drummer Al Hagy.

Mr. Remington has an impressive bio. He was the house steel player at Gold Star Studios in Houston, where George Jones cut "Why Baby Why," with Herb. He was also a member of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys from from 1946 to '49. But to me, Herb was most of all a fine writer of catchy and timeless instrumentals. The classics "Boot Heel Drag" and "Remington Ride" are on this album, along with many other great instrumentals he penned. As far as my own songwriting goes, this LP was by far the most influential. The stylistic variations presented by Herb and company opened my eyes to what boundaries could easily be crossed, and Herb's songs are a template for "go-to" possibilities.

IT'S A TASTY VITAMIN SHAKE FOR ONE'S HUMANITY

"Sam and Oscar" opens side one, and it's a stunner somewhat reminiscent of Django's "Swing 42." Paul Buskirk's solo is an absolute must-hear. He shreds effortlessly while retaining a melodic playfulness. "Minni Lani" is up next, a warm steel-guitar jazz piece with lovely changes that display heartfelt performances by all. It's followed by "Deep Beat," a cut that combines rock, jazz and swing, and plays like an "odd man out" here, even while it fits in seamlessly. The next track, "Lonesome," begins with a "Nightlife" turnaround that again showcases Herb Remington's prowess on midtempo steel-guitar jazz. This is enhanced by Darrell Raley's great saxophone contributions. "Coo-Coo Creek Hop" follows, with the guitar and steel playfully answering what almost seems like sonic mating calls.

Side two opens with my favorite track, "Chime Out for Love." The A section is filled with angelic harmonics that set the table for Mr. Buskirk's solo, which is fantastic. Herb follows Buskirk (not an easy thing to do) with inventive harmonics, all without skipping a beat. The next track, "Slush Pump," revisits the "Deep Beat" vein, again combining rock, swing and blues. The LP races to the finish line with Herby's classic instrumental "Boot Heel Drag." Herb knew how to write a hit, and this song is filled with hooks. The record closes with another classic instrumental, "Remington Ride," featuring a ripping Paul Buskirk solo. If you haven't heard Mr. Buskirk, this LP is a great primer.

If you want some good music, or need something to restore your mental balance after binge-watching hours of NFL commercials, I highly recommend multiple listenings to *Steel Guitar Holiday*. It's a tasty vitamin shake for one's humanity.

Special thanks to Joe Goldmark, Chris Clem, Jeff Keyton and the whole gang at the Steel Guitar Forum for their valued information!

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

BY TERRY CARLETON

Tyke McGear

This rare child's 1964 Selcol Beatles New Sound Guitar is a Maccaferri marvel by another name.

WHILE I MOSTLY collect weird guitars, I also love Pez dispensers, old radios, records, and just about anything related to the Beatles. Two of those passions — weird guitars and the Fab Four — intersect in this issue's Whack Job, a plastic guitar from the British Invasion emblazoned with the group's likenesses. I've wanted one of these for decades, but the price kept them out of reach until kismet, kindness and luck bestowed this very model upon me.

This toy guitar was made in 1964 by Selcol, a firm in England, under license by Mastro, an American company owned by Mario Maccaferri, the brilliant luthier who made the wonderful French flattops Django Reinhardt played in the 1930s. Amid Europe's political turmoil in the run-up to WWII, Maccaferri moved his shop to America just in time for a moratorium on using wood to build anything that wasn't for the war effort. He found success manufacturing clothing pins from plastic and eventually built an array of musical instruments — including drums, bongos and, yes, awesome guitars and ukuleles — from the material.

When my buddy and 8-Ball teammate guitarist Matt Turbin went to England last year for his daughter's wedding, I jokingly asked him to pick me up one of these rarities. To my surprise, he found one on London's Craigslist. Though it was missing its tuners and strings, it was in one piece, with vibrant graphics. And at just $150, it was a steal!

GUITAR PHOTOS BY MAY YAM

WEIRDO FACTOR

What's truly bizarre is that this toy "New Sound Guitar," as Selcol called it, is playable and sounds quite good. That's surprising not only because it's made of plastic but also because it's a novelty made simply to cash in on the Beatles boom.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

While it may not compare with pro examples, Maccaferri's "Plastic Mac" has a scale length accurate to that of a soprano uke. The frets are measured and molded into just the right position, and the bracing beneath the top is strategically placed into the plastic mold.

Finding new tuners wasn't straightforward. Replacement parts aren't available, and original tuners are rare and sell for between 50 and 75 bucks apiece. But as it happens, Maccaferri used the same parts on plastic instruments it built based on Disney characters [*see inset*]. For $15, I bought a Mickey Mouse ukulele on eBay, and after moving the tuners to the Selcol guitar — and paying $7 for multicolored strings — returned my Beatles ukulele to stock.

VALUE

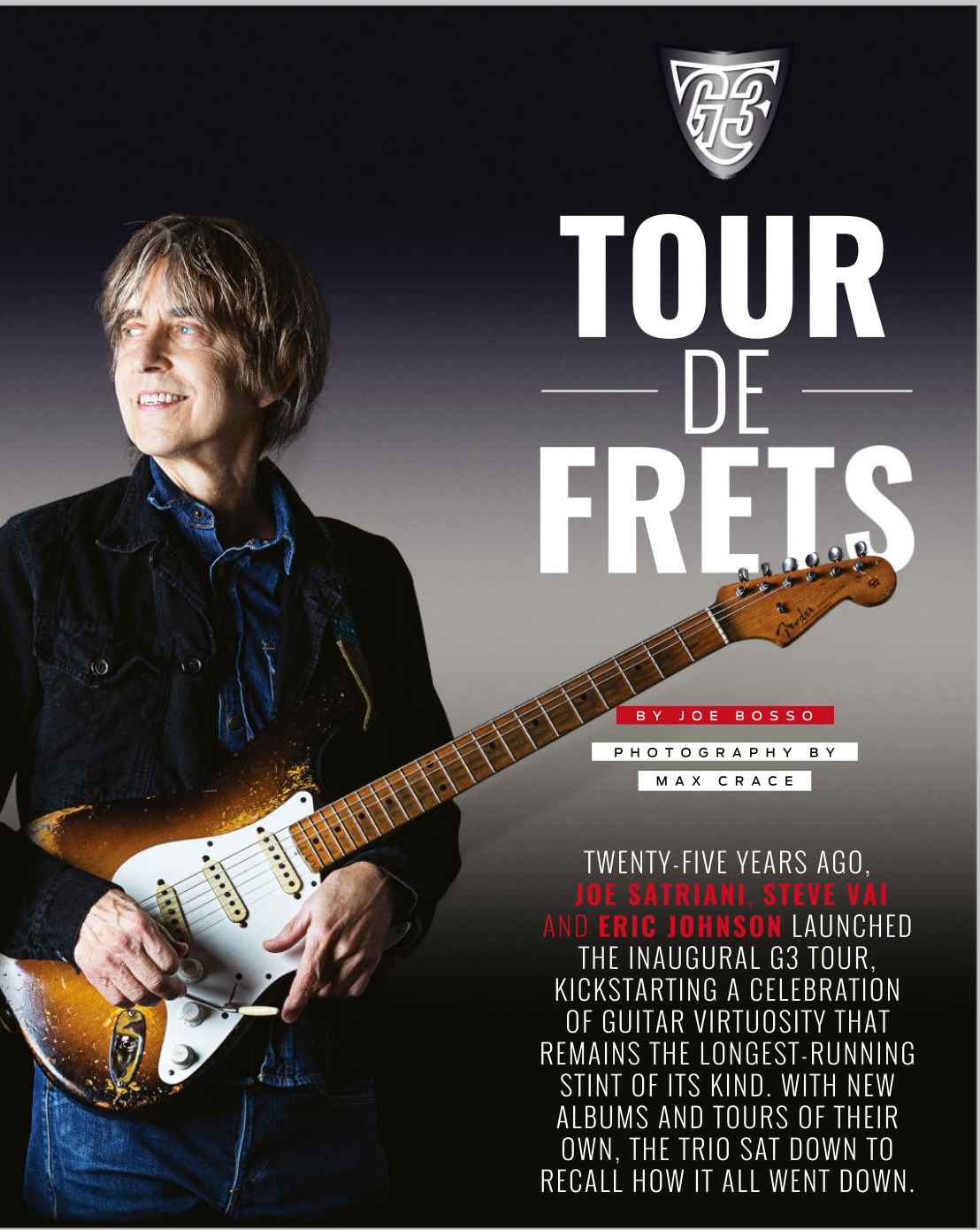
These sold for $5 in 1964. At the time I wrote this, two were on eBay for $2,500 and $5,000 bucks. Even beat-up examples command between $500 and $750, all of which makes the $172 I paid for my instrument a bargain.

WHY IT RULES

It's Beatles memorabilia first and foremost, but it's also a Plastic Mac. The first thing I played on it as soon as I got it assembled was McCartney's version of "Something." I almost cried.

Many thanks to Matt Turbin for making my tongue-in-cheek request a reality.

JEN ROSENSTEIN (VAI & SATRIANI)



TOUR DE FRETS

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAX CRACE

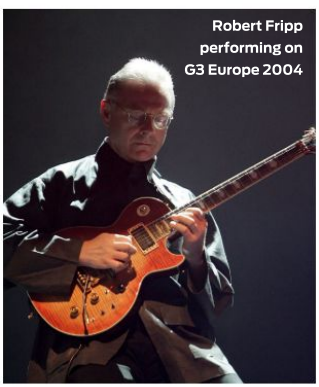
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, **JOE SATRIANI**, **STEVE VAI** AND **ERIC JOHNSON** LAUNCHED THE INAUGURAL G3 TOUR, KICKSTARTING A CELEBRATION OF GUITAR VIRTUOSITY THAT REMAINS THE LONGEST-RUNNING STINT OF ITS KIND. WITH NEW ALBUMS AND TOURS OF THEIR OWN, THE TRIO SAT DOWN TO RECALL HOW IT ALL WENT DOWN.

Eric Johnson, Joe Satriani and Steve Vai, shown here and throughout, on the inaugural 1996 G3 Tour

BY THE MID-1990s, Joe Satriani had things pretty much sewn up career-wise. Four of his six studio albums had gone either Gold or Platinum, and his touring dance card was filled for much of any given year. But despite his spectacular success, something had started to feel a little...off. He wasn't having the kind of fun he had imagined years before, when he was a budding guitarist dreaming about rock stardom.

"I thought there would be more camaraderie among other players than what I was experiencing," he says. "As a teenager, I had this idea of what things would be like if I ever hit it big. There would be parties, and I'd get to hang out with my guitar friends. We'd jam and talk about music all night long — that kind of thing. Instead, the opposite was true: I was isolated. I would go on tour and play the same set, and then I'd go back to my hotel room and be on my own. I'd have 100 shows in front of me, and then I'd have to make another record and do it all over again."

Satriani wanted to shake things up, but he didn't quite know how. And then it hit him: He would create a new kind of show, one that celebrated the communal spirit of guitar playing that he craved. "Nobody was really doing anything of the kind," he says. "You had blues and reggae festivals. You'd see disco revivals and things like that. Lollapalooza had just started up. But there was nothing really that spoke to guitarists."


Robert Fripp performing on G3 Europe 2004

It's no coincidence that, at that time, interest in guitar was entering a slump from which it would take years to recover. Starting in the late 1980s, rap and hip-hop had grown in popularity, and were the dominant forms of popular music as the century careened toward its conclusion. Youngsters had become more interested in the power of two turntables and a microphone than in the trenchant blast of a Les Paul cranked through a Marshall stack. It was still too early to see the lean years that would come, when guitar heroes' relevance would dim, but Satch's desire for a guitarist-led event would prove timely.

"IT WAS IMPORTANT TO ME TO KEEP THE SPIRIT OF GUITAR MUSIC ALIVE NO MATTER WHAT NEW STYLE OF MUSIC WAS BECOMING POPULAR"
—JOE SATRIANI

"I wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with my friends and peers," he recalls. "And so I thought, Well, nobody else is doing it, so I'll do it."

Satriani met with his management team and laid out his grand vision of a traveling show featuring himself and two other guitarists (hence the "G3" moniker), with each player performing an hour-long set followed by a three-way jam. Once his managers were sold on the idea, the hard part began: convincing booking agents and concert promoters of the package's validity. "We were breaking the rules that everybody had been taught over the years," Satriani explains. "Promoters around the world, and especially in the U.S., like to keep guitarists' itineraries separated, for business reasons. They don't want to dilute the market. But I always thought this format would be energizing, because it went against the trends. I always knew it could work."

Since its first run in 1996, G3 has become the longest-running guitar-centric tour of its kind. All in all, Satriani has taken the show on 18 treks across the U.S., Europe, South America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Along with Satch himself, the tour has featured guitarists such as John Petrucci, Robert Fripp, Steve Morse, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Steve Lukather, Yngwie Malmsteen, Michael Schenker, Uli Jon Roth, Paul Gilbert, Al Di Meola, Adrian Legg, Phil Collen and the Aristocrats.

But none of it would have happened had G3's maiden voyage not connected with audiences. Satriani knew his first package had to pack a wallop, and his dream lineup — a triple-headline bill he shared with his close friend and one-time guitar pupil Steve Vai, along with Texas guitar star Eric Johnson

JEAN BAPTISTE LACROIX/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (FRIPP)

— was a no-brainer. “I really didn’t have to think about it,” he says. “I wanted to do it with them, and that was all there was to it. I knew we could all shine together onstage.”

Vai and Johnson required no arm twisting. “I said yes immediately,” Vai says. “The second Joe told me about what he wanted to do, I was in. And it superseded other plans I may have had, because the concept felt fresh. Plus, it was something that I thought was needed in the guitar community at the time. The idea was just fantastic.”

Says Johnson, “I felt the same way. It sounded like a novel idea at the time. I remember my manager said, ‘I like this. It sounds really different and cool.’”

Some 25 years on, the first G3 tour and its subsequent editions remain a singular achievement in the world of guitar. Coincidentally, all three of the tour’s founding members are currently releasing albums and planning tours. We thought it was the perfect opportunity to ask them to reminisce about their experiences together and to fantasize what another run might look like.

By the late ’90s, it was evident that guitar-based music was losing popularity as rap and hip-hop became the dominant genres. Joe, did you have a premonition that the guitar was in danger of losing some of its relevance when you launched G3 in 1996, just a few years before?

JOE SATRIANI I was more focused on what I felt the fans were craving, and what I too was craving: more fun with the guitar. Having been a performing musician since I was 14 years old, I knew that styles would change and society would simply change channels, so I wasn’t phased by what was happening in the mid-to-late ’90s. It was important to me to keep the spirit of guitar music alive no matter what new style of music was becoming popular. I wanted more interaction with great players, and I knew the audience wanted the same. So I took the bull by the horns.

Eric, as everybody knows, Joe and Steve share a long history. When you signed up for G3, did you feel like you had to break the ice with two guys who knew each other so well?

ERIC JOHNSON Well, maybe a little bit, but they were always affable and made me feel comfortable right away. Obviously, Joe and Steve grew up together, and I wasn’t a part of that. But I was totally aware of both of them and their music. I respected them and knew what they were about. I was welcomed very warmly, and that made it very easy to be a part of G3.

Joe and Steve, did you feel like you had to bring Eric into the fold, or were you two like, “Oh, he’ll figure it out”?

SATRIANI I knew it would be fine. I never thought that we had to coach each other. We were all of the same mind: “Isn’t this going to be amazing?” Then at the end of the night, when we start playing together, our attitude was, Let’s just wing it and see what happens! And I can’t tell you how excited I was every night to be destroyed by these two guitar players.

STEVE VAI Come on! [*laughs*]

SATRIANI It’s true. It was so much fun, because it’s one thing when somebody destroys you onstage like that, and you’re right next to them and you can see how

they do it. It's a life-learning experience. I loved that, and it's something I've always loved about every G3. There's nothing like it. You can't replicate it in any other way.

VAI To answer the question you asked about having Eric: Yes, Joe and I have a friendship that goes way back, a very rich, wonderful friendship throughout our lives. We've been joined at the hip since I was 12. [*laughs*] So to do G3, and to know that Eric was going to do it, too, I was immediately thrilled. Bringing Eric into the fold, it never felt like Joe and I were a group and there was an outsider. We were all very present in the moment. We were three accomplished, mutually respectful players really looking to raise the bar for ourselves and for the guitar. I know for me, every time I get on a stage with really accomplished, inspired players, it's impossible not to expand my own potential.

Like Joe says, when you're standing next to these guys, they push you and challenge you. You have to raise your bar because they're doing it. That's the feeling you get when it's your turn. It's very inspiring, and it's nice. Some of my favorite onstage moments were when the three of us were playing together and listening to one another. It's a very intimate space, and nobody is Joe, Steve or Eric. It's just this environment of listening and responding.

Joe, during those first G3 tours, did you have a sense that you were keeping the spirit of guitar virtuosity alive at a time when it was in short supply? Did that have an impact on the shows, either in your commitment to keep doing them or in who you brought along on tour?

SATRIANI The G3 stage was the one place where you could play any way you wished. There were no boundaries. You could overdo it, or you could underplay it and be subtle. You could stand still, you could sit like Robert Fripp, or you could bring your own rock and roll circus to the stage. I encouraged my fellow players to try anything and everything every night. We would support, echo and sometimes challenge each others' improvisational tangents. Virtuosity on the guitar comes in many forms, and there's no reason they can't be celebrated right next to each other.

There have been three other tours with this lineup. When you tour, does it feel like "the band is back together"? Like you're the Three Amigos.

SATRIANI "The Three Amigos" — I like that. [*laughs*] I think we should launch another tour once the world opens up a bit. It would be interesting to see where we've been musically. We can come back and trade our secrets once again.

JOHNSON Yeah, yeah!

VAI I'm down.

JOHNSON We could wear those Mexican outfits like [*Chevy Chase, Martin Short and Steve Martin*] did in *The Three Amigos*. At least for the encore. [*laughs*]

Joe, when you put together other iterations, did you ever ask Steve or Eric

Vai with his triple-neck Ibanez on G3 Europe 2004

Satriani and Vai with John Petrucci on G3 2006

who they wanted to come along as the third guitarist?

SATRIANI Well, it's a complicated thing putting G3 together, because my responsibility is both creating and selling the package. It starts a year before we want to hit the road. There are a number of scenarios that we have to float to all the different promoters to get a consensus of what they will agree is worthy of the invitation, because you can only play if you're invited. You don't just show up.

> **"WE WERE THREE ACCOMPLISHED, MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL PLAYERS REALLY LOOKING TO RAISE THE BAR FOR OURSELVES, AND FOR THE GUITAR"**
>
> —STEVE VAI

That means that we come up with Plans A, B, C, D, E, F and G, and then we see what the reaction is. Part of the music business is pretty cruel. It's numbers and statistics. It's always been about ticket sales, but back then it was a lot about radio. These days, the social media thing is really a big deal. It's the first thing promoters do: They see if you're trending on TikTok or Instagram. They need to determine if they want to take the risk.

That's how that starts. And, of course, there's a fine line between sticking to your guns about what you really want to do and listening to the feedback you get from your promoters. There's no way to know who should be the third guy in Eastern Europe versus Canada, so you've got to talk to the promoters to see what they think and what suggestions they might have.

Sometimes they're good ones, and sometimes you're scratching your head going, "Really?" It's difficult. It's a very long period, and we have to be extremely quiet and discreet about it until we've distilled all this advice and feedback. Then we put out the invitations and reach out to the players that have risen to the top of the list, and we have to see what they say. Some players don't want to play with other guitarists.

I suppose that's true.

SATRIANI Yeah. I think there are fearless players out there, and then there are people who are still very guarded. I think that's the defining difference. These gentlemen here are fearless and totally confident, and they just want to make their audience happy. That's what you want. You don't want any other baggage coming onstage.

I imagine sometimes choosing the third guitarist feels very easy and natural, but are there instances when you've thought, I don't know how this is going to work?

SATRIANI Well, one of the most interesting characters was Robert Fripp, beyond a doubt. When he joined up, he insisted that he not be listed, and he wanted to play before the show. He said, "Look, don't turn the lights on. I'm going to sit behind all the amps, and I'm going to play music as people walk into the venue and find their seats. And don't mention my name." It's what he wanted to do.

Sometimes [*bassist*] Stu Hamm would play with him unannounced. He'd just come out, sit right next to Robert and he'd play along, or some of the other guys would play. It was really quite beautiful. Robert is such a wonderful human being and an incredible musician. We did a couple of other tours together, just me, Steve and Robert playing the blues or something. It was hysterical, and he was fearless about that. He was Robert Fripp to the very end.

JOHNSON Well, I was actually thinking of Robert Fripp when Joe mentioned him, because it was like, Wow, that's different! He was definitely coming from left field, I think. But it was beautiful and cool. People really enjoyed it, too. I thought it sounded great. A lot of people told me, "Hey, have you heard Robert play with the G3 thing?" They thought it was great.

For the encore jams, you three have played "Red House," "Goin' Down" and "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama." How do you guys come up with those songs?

SATRIANI We start emailing each other about what would be a fun song. I think I put it to the guys that we should pick

JEAN BAPTISTE LACROIX/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (VAI); BOB KING/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (2006)

songs that weren't our own but were somehow connected to us in some way. They would be songs that the audience would recognize and that would celebrate the guitar. It wasn't about one of the participants' new single or something like that. We had to drop all that pretense that we were there to sell our new thing. I think the Zappa song was Steve's suggestion. He brought that in, and it was great. It turned into one we did over and over again through the years.

VAI Joe would always reach out for suggestions, and there were many, many songs we'd toss out. Some of them would be head-scratchers, but I always relied on Joe to decipher it all, feel through it and pick what the final jam songs would be. That went for everything — routing, position in the set, where you're standing onstage. It was always diplomatic, but there's a practical sensibility that needs to be exercised in all of these things. And that was Joe, because he's got the tools.

Joe and Steve, you've done a number of G3s with John Petrucci as the third guitarist. Eric, I think you played on one tour with John. Is that right?

JOHNSON I did, yeah, in South America. John Petrucci's amazing. I'm more familiar with him now, and his drummer, Mike Mangini. You know how there are certain groups that you don't know their whole deal? Even though they're almost a parallel track as yours, it's not somebody you really listen to that much, but you still knew they were great. I wasn't familiar with John at first, but I was really blown away by him. It was kind of funny, though, because when I first met Mike Mangini, I didn't know who he was. I asked him, "Are you down here teching for the band?"

VAI I remember that.

JOHNSON Then I heard him play, and I was like, "Oh, my God." I should say that teching's no different than playing. I think I embarrassed myself, because I didn't know who he was. It was a bummer, because I was never able to get to know him; I think I made him feel awkward. But he was such a fabulous drummer, and John was remarkable. They had a whole different thing going on, with the way they broke up time signatures and stuff. It was just amazing. I got schooled on that during the tour, not unlike the G3s that I did with Joe and Steve. It was like taking lessons every single night.

This is for all of you: How did your G3 experiences impact your feelings about the other two guys here?

SATRIANI Whoa… There have been so many moments when I would stand on the side of the stage watching Steve and Eric play, and then I'd look out at the audience and think, Do they have any idea how amazing this thing is? When are they ever going to see this again?" [*Satriani's cell phone rings*] Oh, sorry about that. It's my agent calling.

JOHNSON He's saying, "Come on. Book a G3 tour!" [*laughs*]

SATRIANI And make it snappy! [*mutes his phone*] Like I said, there were so many moments. For me, in those private moments, standing there and watching them play, it was beyond remarkable. They truly felt the music, and that's very inspiring. And then to see what they did to the audience, lifting them up, raising their spirits. It just makes you think, We're doing the right thing.

JOHNSON With Joe, I was really shocked at his precision, virtuosity and sound. Every single night, he would nail everything, unlike somebody else who might be talking. [*laughs*] Obviously, his records are beautiful, but he plays that stuff live to a T. His touch, his fingering… truly outstanding. He would

Satch and Petrucci with Uli Jon Roth on G3 2018, in Berlin

STEFAN HOEDERATH/GETTY IMAGES (2018)

just nail it all the way. And then there's Steve — this organic guitar orchestra. From comedy to sadness, he packs in all these different emotions, and they go way beyond guitar sounds. That blew my mind. It was just such a hemisphere of learning for me.

How about you, Steve?

VAI With Joe and Eric, I already knew of their excellence. You know, I can be a sloppy, visceral performer. I always enjoy what I do, but there's a little part of me that says, "You can be better. You can be more concise. You can be clearer and cleaner." So when I'd get onstage with these guys, that's what I recognized. Seeing them perform, I saw the presentation of a whole piece of music that was immaculate.

No disrespect to any other G3 performer, but if I go back to listen to any G3 record, I go right to Eric's performance of "Manhattan," which is flawless. Every night I would watch him, and beyond being absolutely entertained by a musician at the height of his potential, I would always feel like, Steve, you've got to do more of that. He was inspired and performed beautifully from beginning to end.

"THE WAY JOHN PETRUCCI AND HIS DRUMMER BROKE UP TIME SIGNATURES — IT WAS JUST AMAZING. I GOT SCHOOLED ON THAT DURING THE TOUR"

—ERIC JOHNSON

And, of course, that's Joe's middle name. You know how many times I've seen him perform? [*laughs*] Every time he gives you this incredible presentation. What he offers you is beautiful. The song is respected, and it's mastered completely.

You get as much out of it as the audience.

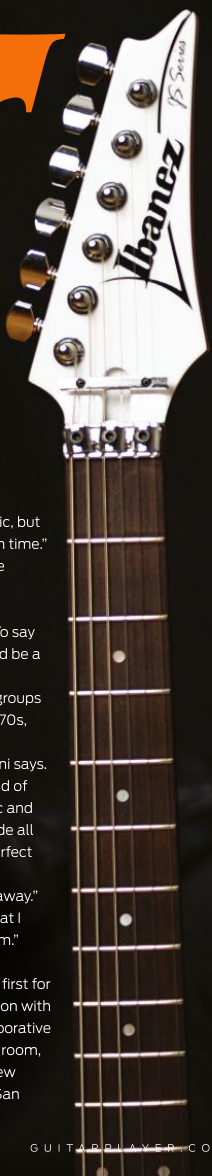
VAI Oh yeah. When I see these guys do what they do, I could be depressed or I could be inspired. And they always inspired me. I knew how they could perform. But what was interesting for me was putting a microscope on myself. If anything, I've always been a bit of a pretentious rock star. [*Joe and Eric laugh*] It's true — you guys know it. And that was exorcized out of me a bit. When you work with guys like this — because they're humble, and they're excellent — it's fun and educational to get your ass kicked. We were friends before, and we're friends after. What more could you ask for?

JOE'S BIG ADVENTURE

ON *THE ELEPHANTS OF MARS*, JOE SATRIANI GOES IN SEARCH OF NEW THEMES AND TEXTURES. THE RESULT? MORE JOE THAN EVER BEFORE.

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY EDUARDO PENA DOLHUN



Back in the early spring of 2020, Joe Satriani was conducting business much as he had been for the past 30 years. He had a new record, *Shapeshifting*, set for release, and his concert schedule was full. "And then the pandemic hit, and everything went upside-down," he says. The guitarist went ahead with release plans for the album, but he was forced to reschedule all of his 2020 dates. "Not as easy as it sounds," he points out, "because you don't want to be hit with cancellation fees. Fortunately, we had great relationships with promoters and we were able to work things out." He sighs. "And then we had to do it again."

With the COVID pandemic proving to be a stubborn beast, Satriani was placed in the unenviable position of pushing his rescheduled 2021 dates to this year. And as of this writing, that might not be the end of the tour rejigging. "Everything is in flux because you just can't predict what will happen," he says. "I'm pretty sure COVID-19 is going to become endemic by the end of summer, and we're hoping that we can start the tour in the fall. Everybody's vaccinated and follows protocols. The problem is the restrictions on quarantine and what that does to a budget. We're a tight band and crew, and the last thing you want to do is go out on tour and have one person get sick. You can lose a fortune in a week on tour."

He lets out an exasperated groan. "Part of me is so bored with talking about the nuts and bolts of all of this," he says. "I like making music and talking about music, but this is the reality we've been facing. It's been a rough time."

Beyond touring upheavals, Satriani faced a more devastating blow late last year when his friend and manager, Mick Brigden, died suddenly following an accident on his property in Santa Rosa, California. To say that artist and manager were joined at the hip would be a vast understatement — for the past three decades, Brigden, whose history dates back to working with groups like Humble Pie and the Rolling Stones in the early '70s, represented one client: Joe Satriani.

"There's so much I could say about Mick," Satriani says. "He helped me in so many ways, and he was the kind of guy who made things happen. He was so into music and the artist state of mind, and because of that he made all the work we did fun and challenging. He was the perfect person to guide me, and he was fully involved with everything I did right up till the moment he passed away."

He pauses. "In fact, the day he died, I told him that I was going to be sending him mixes of the new album."

Satriani is referring to his just-issued record, *The Elephants of Mars*. It's his 19th studio album and his first for the earMUSIC label following his longtime association with Sony. For Satch, who traditionally favored the collaborative spirit of recording with other musicians in the same room, the safety protocols imposed by Covid dictated a new path: He would record all of his guitar tracks at his San

"THIS RECORD REALLY FEELS LIKE THE GUARD RAILS HAVE BEEN LIFTED AND ALL BETS ARE OFF"

Francisco home studio, while his small group of guest players (drummer Kenny Aronoff, bassist Bryan Beller and keyboardist Rai Thistlethwayte) would beam their parts in from various points on the globe. Co-producer Eric Caudieux, whose work with the guitarist began on 1998's *Crystal Planet*, kept things moving remotely from Los Angeles.

"Once I got used to the idea that I was going to be stuck at home for a while, I decided to take advantage of the fact that there was no time clock," Satriani says. "I didn't have to do basics in 10 days and get everybody home. I didn't have to do overdubs in three weeks. I didn't have to mix in just two weeks. We had a blank slate, and in a way that was exciting."

Perhaps due to his homebound status while recording, Satriani sounds more restless than ever on *The Elephants of Mars* — and that's a good thing. There's an aspirational, almost transformative quality running through much of the album, best exemplified by the progressive showpiece "Sahara" and the cinematic-tinged title cut, on which the guitarist sheds his readily identifiable classic rock tone and embraces a more slippery, exotic tone. He doesn't forsake rocking

entirely — the slinky and swaggering "Blue Foot Groovy" is boisterous stuff — but the emphasis here is on exploring new themes and textures, and Satriani's intellectual curiosity takes him to some unexpected places. On a trio of cuts — "E 104 St. NYC 1973," "Pumpin'" and "Night Scene" — he folds a distinct jazz-fusion flavor into his blues-rock foundation, and the results are startling.

"I wanted to make an album that I hadn't done before in terms of the scope — the kinds of compositions, instrumentation, mixing...all of it." Satriani says. "Eric Caudieux was part of my last record, and we both felt the same way. The idea was to stretch things out, take our time with the arrangements and try to create a new level of drama. As an artist, I never feel like I want to stay in any one lane, but this record really feels like the guardrails have been lifted and all bets are off."

Does the weight of being called a virtuoso or "guitar god" ever feel like too much? Do you feel as if you have to do something amazing on each song?

[*laughs*] I don't know. I kind of feel like I do that all on my own because of the way music sounded to me ever since I was a kid. When I heard the Dave Clark Five play "Glad All Over," I thought that was amazing. There are so many songs I could name. But I don't think of it in technical terms; when something's right, it's right. When I hear something that's nailing the message, to me that's the highest level of technique. I'm so unimpressed by the display of physical technique in the wrong place.

I've always felt that way. And that's why I've always been able to enjoy music played by guitar players of any genre, because I'm not really interested in that. When I'm sitting down and practicing something, yeah, I'll seek out some example from some player that can stretch the way I'm trying to play. But I won't apply that to my music unless I think it's the right thing to do at the right time.

Of course, the concept of what qualifies as "amazing" is so subjective. To some, Neil Young playing a solo on one string is brilliant, while others would opine that it's too simplistic.

Sure. I grew up listening to Neil, so yeah, to me, he's part of my musical fabric. I never questioned what he played, not once. Comparing guitarists... I mean, how can you compare Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page? They're both geniuses, and they're both courageous and daring. At some point you can't argue this case, because if you don't recognize it as a valid argument, then you can't even join in the conversation — it feels absurd. If somebody doesn't understand the beauty in what Neil Young is doing, then it's better just to walk away.

On a lot of this record, you move away from what people consider to be your signature sound. Why?

I'd done it before. There are a couple of times across my catalog where I specifically turned that quality up. With *The Extremist*, I wanted to make a tribute to my classic rock roots, and every decision we made was based on that. The funny thing was, it came out at the height of grunge. When I did *Shapeshifting*, I was thinking the same thing. I just had this idea that these particular songs would benefit from a real nod to some of the classic-rock ways of recording rock guitar songs. This time around, I thought, No, I'm not going to do that. The songs would dictate how they should sound. I wasn't trying to impose any parameters on the sound.

As opposed to other albums, you recorded this entire record remotely.

Yes, and every guitar part was done in my home studio. It was all recorded DI, and every guitar sound is from the SansAmp plugin.

That must have felt so different to you. You've always said that you love being in a room with other musicians.

I do. I love it. There were many times when I'd take a break from recording this album and I'd play along with some song by Chickenfoot [*his former group with Sammy Hagar, Anthony Michael and Chad Smith*] to re-live those moments. There's something so great about recording live in the studio and getting two or three songs done in an afternoon. But then you go, Okay, I did that. Time to move on. But there's also something great about being left alone so you can play as many stupid ideas as you want and not feel like someone's looking over your shoulder. Doing that opens the floodgates to the emotions in a way that you never experience in a public situation.

Let's talk about some of the new songs. The title track feels very cinematic. Ever thought of doing movie soundtracks?

Hey, I'm ready! [*laughs*] Sure, why not? The song feels like a movie — it's about giant, sentient elephants roaming a newly terraformed Mars. You should be thinking *cinematic*. The track took years to put together, and for the longest time we didn't know how it would wind up. Funnily enough, the guitar solo was one take, and it's just crazy. But that's what you can do when you're left to your own devices and you don't have this time clock going. You can set it up so that you can capture these things, and there's nothing about an exterior schedule that forces you not to do that.

"Blue Foot Groovy" is a completely different animal. It's gritty, raw rock and roll. It would've made a great '70s Rod Stewart song.

Yeah, I think it would! I was thinking of Sammy Hagar when I started writing it. The title started out as "Blue Foot," because I had a series of songs that weren't as complicated as some of the other Chickenfoot songs. Sammy and I were talking about the possibility of eliminating bridges. Anyway, it was a bit of a nugget that blew up afterward. And then I kept trying to come up with a title and everybody kept saying, "No, 'Blue Foot Groovy' — that's what the title is."

"THIS IS THE FIRST ALBUM WHERE I DIDN'T USE AN AMPLIFIER. EVERY GUITAR SOUND COMES FROM THE SANSAMP PLUGIN"

Three of the tracks — "E 104th St. NYC 1973," "Pumpin'" and "Night Scene" — have a lot of jazz fusion in them.

Yeah. Earlier you asked me about dodging the classic-rock thing, and see, once you remove a singular goal in production, you're also removing barriers from what you can write and play. There's no way to have that relaxed, sprawling, lyrical, yet fusiony kind of improvisation on a piece like "E 104th St." unless you allow that to happen and just write about a vibe and a point in your personal history and how you experienced that.

That track was funny. I had two drum loops in the demo — one was straight and one was swinging — and the combination was so messed-up sounding, but it was so curiously attractive. It was difficult for the guys to figure out how they were actually going to interpret it. Eventually, they made it sound smooth as silk because they're so cool and they're so good at what they do. But my improv on top of the demo was actually over these two loops that were fighting each other. Should it be straight hip-hop or swing jazz? That was one of the funny things I put out to the guys, and they had to figure out how to rectify *straight* and *swing* at the same time.

You play a seven-string on "Through a Mother's Day Darkly." Are you a good seven-string player?

[*laughs*] Well, as I'm playing I'm always reminding myself, "That's a B string, Joe. That's a B string." So the answer is no, I guess. But I'm a spirited musician. I try to think like Hendrix and Page, because they were so fearless and they went where they wanted. You've got all these incredible performances in all kinds of genres.

I recorded that track really fast. I pulled out my JS6 signature prototype that was turned into a seven-string. I hadn't played it in years; it had been in its case, and the strings were never changed. They were so loose because they'd lost their tension, but I found that interesting. I just wrote the song based on that tactile response and the fact that it was such a weird Mother's Day, in lockdown.

What other guitars did you use?

Basically the guitars that I was touring with and keep at home: the chrome signature model guitar, the red MCO and a prototype for a paisley guitar. That's pretty much it. I think there's a sitar on there. For acoustics, I used a Martin and my JSA model. Usually when I go into a studio, we bring 200 guitars. I don't know why, and maybe there's 15 or 20 that we play. A lot of that has to do with the moment.

It's the same thing with amps. This is the first album I've ever made where I didn't use any exterior amplifier. I have all the amps in the world that anybody should have, but every time I AB'd an amp against the DI guitar going through the SansAmp, the SansAmp delivered more Joe than anything else.

"Delivering more Joe" — I like that.

That's basically what it is. I know that's a really weird thing to come out of my mouth, but that's what it comes down to. At the end of the record, Eric and I were scratching our heads going, "How is this possible?" It's pretty funny. ♪

NECKS & RELIGION

BETWEEN A PAIR OF SHOULDER SURGERIES, STEVE VAI DELIVERS *INVIOLATE*, AN ALBUM OF ARTISTIC PURITY, ARMED WITH A GRETSCH AND THE TRIPLE-NECKED HYDRA.

BY MARK McSTEA

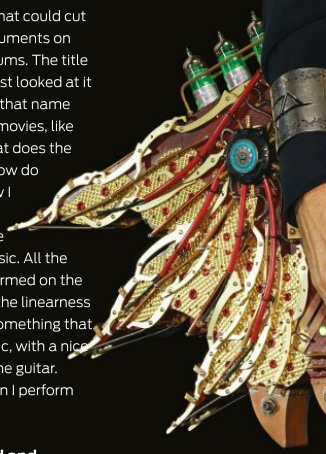
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARRY DiMARZIO

***INVIOLATE*, STEVE VAI'S** new album, delivers everything fans have come to expect from the guitar wizard in terms of sonic innovation and ever-expanding creative horizons. But it also throws in a few curve balls with the use of clean Gretsch and Strat tones, and the introduction of the Hydra, a beast of a guitar with three necks and enough onboard gizmos to land it on the moon. Vai's philosophy about making music is simple in theory but considerably more difficult in practice. "I always say to myself that, for at least one point in every track, I have to do something that I haven't done before," he reveals. "And it has to sound like music."

The guitarist underwent shoulder surgery to repair an injury around early 2021, which allowed him to record the new album. Subsequent to his tour, at the time of our talk, he discovered that a second surgery was necessary, which will delay his worldwide *Inviolate* to until September. Always positive in his outlook, the guitarist was unfazed by the temporary setback and looking forward to the eventual road trip.

I see you resisted the temptation to go for the pun on your name with the album title.
I thought about it. [*laughs*] I wrote that word down so many ways, thinking, How do I want to spell it? I just thought that it would be bastardizing it, and it wouldn't mean anything anymore, so I avoided the temptation.

"Teeth of the Hydra," the opening track, was cut with your new three-necked Hydra. Was it all played in real time?
Yeah, the idea was to create an instrument that could cut the piece all in one shot. The only other instruments on there are some keyboard parts and some drums. The title came first, when I saw the finished guitar. I just looked at it and knew it had to be called the Hydra. I got that name from my love of old stop-motion animation movies, like *Jason and the Argonauts*. I then thought, What does the piece of music need to say with that title? How do I make the title audible? That's basically how I approached writing the song. I wanted to capture the essence of the guitar — its image and its abilities — and translate that into music. All the bass, seven-string and harp strings are performed on the Hydra at the same time. The challenge was the linearness of it. I knew that, ultimately, I had to create something that was enjoyable as a standalone piece of music, with a nice melody. I didn't want it to be a gimmick for the guitar. People may not realize what is going on when I perform that piece until they see me do it.



I guess it's a little like patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time.
Exactly, that's a good way of putting it. Either that or juggling chainsaws. [*laughs*]

"FOR AT LEAST ONE POINT IN EVERY TRACK, I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING THAT I HAVEN'T DONE BEFORE. AND IT HAS TO SOUND LIKE MUSIC"

Having seen photos of the guitar, I'm wondering what the case for it looks like. It must be huge.

It's so funny that you mention that. I had a meeting about it with my tech this morning, because the case that we have is large. To take it on tour is a whole other story. We have to have an Anvil case built around the existing case. It's going to be the size of a Volkswagen when we're done.

Is there any prospect of Ibanez producing it for sale if there is a demand?

[*laughs*] I can assure you that the Hydra is not a production-model instrument. It took four years to build. It's highly technical, with built-in synthesizers, a Sustainer pickup... So many things. The cost to build it would not be within anybody's budget. Having said that, I guess I've seen odder things happen. Hopefully, it will spark the imagination in some new young luthiers to do outrageous things. The thing about multinecked guitars is that their functionality is usually fairly limited,

but if you can embrace the potential of the Hydra, you're in a whole other neighborhood.

I guess you won't be throwing the Hydra around your neck in the tradition of all the hair-metal era videos?
[*laughs*] I tried. No, you can't because we have a strap that goes around my waist to take the weight of the guitar. I should look into getting something to make it spin around like ZZ Top did in that old video clip [*for "Legs"*] with the furry guitars.

"Zeus in Chains" has a very commercial stop-start feel in the main part of the song.
This started out as a simple riff that I had recorded into my iPhone before I went to sleep, on a guitar that I keep by my bed. I usually sit there and plunk about before bed and document any riffs that I feel have some energy. I had the first 16 bars, and then it sat there, beckoning me. Occasionally, I'd give in and pull the track to have a think about it. The basic demo idea had all of the energy, so I knew what the finished piece was going to be like. The title didn't come until after I recorded the piece. I knew that I wanted to enhance the tonality of it by using a seven-string, for those big, fat clustery chords. The idea was to let the chords ring out lushly, then create a soaring melody that arose out of the chords. Very ugly can be beautiful too, so I had some very ugly chords spitting out beautifully macabre melodies. When I was listening back and trying to come up with a title, I was trying to let the track tell me what the title should be: What imagery was coming at me? When it got to the heavy middle section, it just said the title to me.

"Little Pretty" was recorded on a Gretsch, which most fans wouldn't expect to see on one of your records.
Yeah, it took me by surprise too. [*laughs*] This was, again, a bedside riff that I had. I had the chords for the first eight bars, and there was something very intriguing about it. It had a darkness, but there was some kind of light, and there was a menacing nature to it. All I had was those few chords, and it lived on the shelf for about five years. When I started to unpack it, I was listening to the riff, which was recorded on an unplugged electric guitar going straight into my iPhone. I just followed the chords, and the melody unfolded. I originally had another title for it, "The Red Flower," but the melody kept saying "Little Pretty" to me. The menacing nature of the harmonic structure created this image for me of something reflective of Dorothy and the Wicked Witch, or Little Red Riding Hood. The whole melody suggested the wolf to me. The riff usually tells me what guitar to use, which will usually be a [*Vai's signature Ibanez*] JEM or a PIA. I'm really not comfortable on any other guitar or able to play to my full potential. I really love archtops though, and I have a wonderful collection of them. I love the tonality of a Gretsch. I guess most of us know that tonality because of Brian Setzer. The riff just didn't work on a solid-bodied guitar, but the Gretsch had the dimension that I was looking for.

Vai with an Onyx Black Ibanez PIA

At times it suggests hints of a spy movie soundtrack.
Yeah, it's kind of nefarious. [*laughs*]

There's another major sonic departure for you on "Candlepower." The guitar on that cut sounds like a clean Strat, although it is still unmistakably you playing.
Yeah, I can't help that. [*laughs*] No artist can. This was another bedside riff [*plays four bars on an unplugged guitar*], then a couple of chords that went with it to create some energy. One of the things that I like to do for myself is create a challenge by setting up certain parameters. It's not uncommon for me to consider doing a guitar solo all on one string with one finger, because, although you're applying limitations, there are infinite

possibilities within those limitations. I'll end up doing things that I wouldn't normally do, so then I'll have a new vocabulary.

When I listened back to my "Candlepower" riff, I decided to flesh it out, use a clean Strat-style guitar, use my right-hand fingers — I've spent precious little time honing my finger-picking technique — and no whammy bar, which is like removing an arm for me. [*laughs*] As I said before, I like to infuse each song with something that is unique for me. I came up with the concept in my head for bending and releasing multiple strings in different directions at the same time, while crawling up the neck using open strings to increase the flow of the music. I knew what it would sound like before I did it, but it was unbelievably difficult for me to execute the technique at first.

This is another one of those "patting your head and rubbing your stomach" moments, isn't it?

Exactly, plus rubbing the bottom of my feet with my pinkie and rubbing my toe while my head is spinning. [*laughs*] What I have noticed, though, is that anything that might seem impossible doesn't seem so impossible once you start doing it.

The last track that I wanted to discuss is "Knappsack," which demonstrates the way that a limitation can create opportunity and inspiration. You were unable to use your right hand at all, because you were recovering from shoulder surgery.

Yeah. What I try to do is first accept what is, and from there ask myself, What can the situation do to serve me? That's a very important question to ask. Most people don't ask questions when they see obstacles; they only see negativity and their creativity becomes derailed. I had a long-standing shoulder issue which needed to be fixed, and it was an easy, simple surgery. Because I'm doing so much press, it seems like maybe I'm this guy who's accident prone, but I'm very healthy and I'm doing very well.

When I got back from the surgery, I had this sling on my shoulder, and the name of the sling was the Knappsack, which was designed by the doctor that did my surgery, Dr. Knapp. A new Onyx Black PIA had just arrived at the house when I got back. I sat in my studio, put the guitar on my lap — I couldn't use my right hand at all, as it was in the sling — so I started playing with my left hand, and it all just came to me. I wanted to create an enjoyable piece of music, with a nice melody and some crazy soloing, which is almost the story of my life. [*laughs*] When it was done, I asked myself whether it sounded like a piece of music or a novelty, and it sounded like a piece of music.

With Evo, the Ibanez JEM7VWH that is his primary stage and recording guitar

"MOST PEOPLE DON'T ASK QUESTIONS WHEN THEY SEE OBSTACLES. THEY ONLY SEE NEGATIVITY AND THEIR CREATIVITY BECOMES DERAILED"

You've mentioned a solo acoustic/vocal album that you've been working on sporadically. Is that likely to be completed and released in the foreseeable future?

I uploaded a version of me singing and playing acoustic guitar on a song called "The Moon and I" during lockdown, which is something I never normally do. Over the years, I've collected a lot of little snippets of songs that have a harmonic feeling to them, that don't sound like anything from my catalog. When I uploaded that song, the response was surprising to me. There were so many favorable comments. That made me think that I should get on with doing the acoustic album, as I had 15 songs. I recorded the guitar parts for 13 of them and got about halfway through the vocals when my shoulder went out. When I got back from the surgery and recorded "Knappsack," I knew I wanted to tour, so I finished *Inviolate*, because I'm not going to tour on a solo acoustic album. I will finish the vocals and get the record out at some point, but I have a lot of product planned.

And now you're about to have another shoulder surgery.

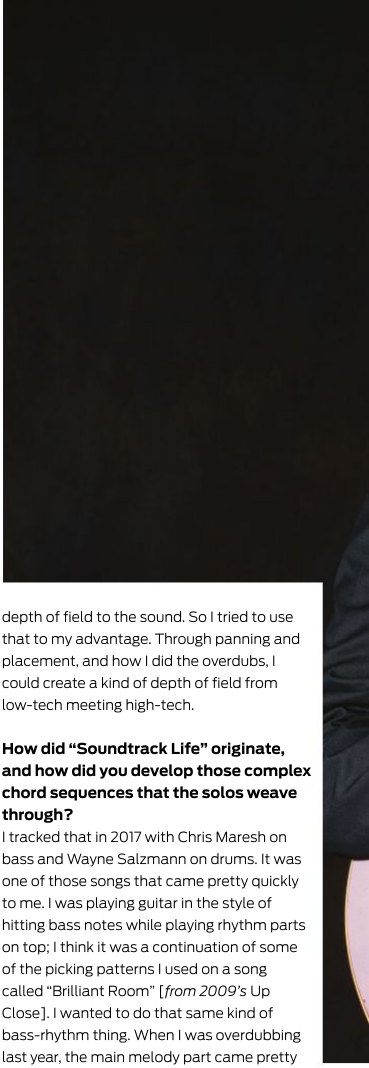
Yes, which means that by the time I've recovered from it, I'll be preparing for the tour, so there isn't any opportunity to do any recording unless I can get the vocals done while I'm on tour. I had the original surgery over a year ago, but over the summer I did something stupid and I re-tore one of the tendons. I could probably get away with completing the tour, but to play the Hydra is quite a challenge and it exaggerated the tear. It became very obvious that it wouldn't be wise to go on a 250-show tour until I get this thing fixed. It's a relatively simple fix and my arm will be out of use for about three weeks. But it might be a while before I can play the Hydra again. [*laughs*]

TWO *of a* KIND

ERIC JOHNSON DIGS INTO HIS VAULT AND COMES UP WITH A WINNING PAIR: *THE BOOK OF MAKING* AND *YESTERDAY MEETS TODAY.*

BY ART THOMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAX CRACE



IT'S SAID THAT adversity breeds opportunity, and for Eric Johnson, the pandemic created just such an opportunity in 2020 to make a record — two in fact: *The Book of Making* and *Yesterday Meets Today* (Sire). So how did he manage to pull off recording a trove of songs — 25 in all, including seven tracks that will appear on a third album called *Take Outs* — at a time when simply being a room together with actual musicians wasn't possible?

"When my tour got cut two weeks short in March 2020, I came home, and everybody was kind of holed up," Johnson says. "So I went to the studio and started going through my tape vault and finding bits and pieces that were anywhere from two-inch analog tape to digital files to even cassettes and reel-to-reel tapes, stuff that went back almost 25 years. They were all little pieces that never were finished. I should say a couple of them were finished, but most needed a significant amount of overdubs."

In keeping with how music gets released these days, Johnson's record company devised a time-release scheme to build interest by giving EJ fans a taste of things to come on the forthcoming two albums, slated for release in July 29. The first round of the six songs scheduled for early release include the instrumental "Soundtrack Life" (the first track on *The Book of Making*) and the pop-flavored title track "Yesterday Meets Today," which will air on April 1. In the same sequence of delivering one song from each record, they'll be followed on May 6 by EJ's soulful rendition of "Sitting on Top of the World" and "Love Will Never Say Goodbye." And on June 10, "Move on Over" and "To Be Alive" — a song Johnson co-wrote with singer/guitarist Arielle — will be the last to appear before the albums debut.

GP spoke with Eric Johnson about the process for making records from material that he'd stashed away, likely without thinking a time would come when he'd need to revisit all these demos and outtakes.

What were the challenges of working on music that you'd recorded so long ago?

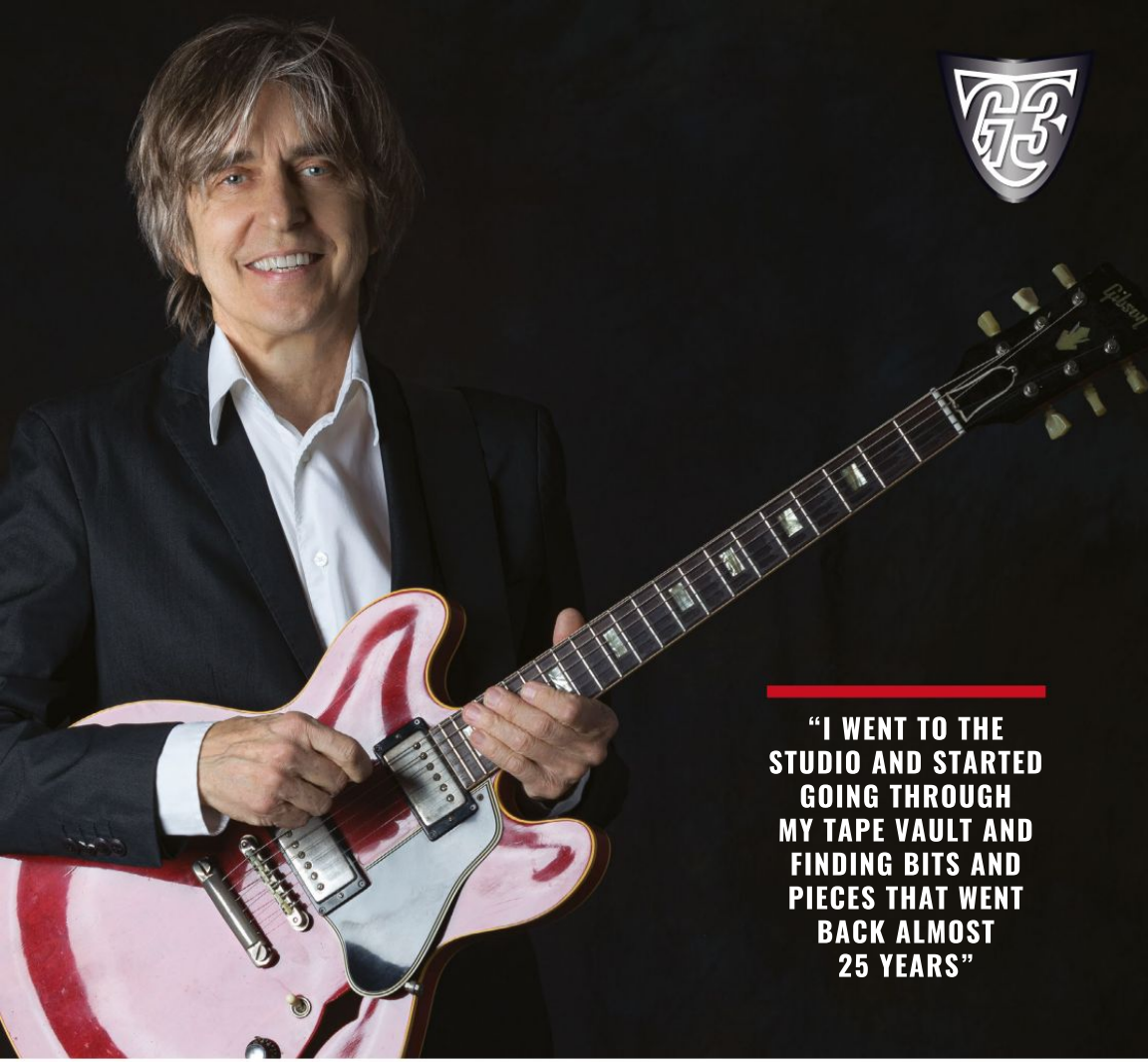
Some of the stuff that came off of cassettes sounded pretty funky, so [*engineer/producer*] Kelly Donnelly EQ'd them to sound as good as possible. But I also found sometimes that doing high-fidelity recordings against low-fidelity recordings added a certain depth of field to the sound. So I tried to use that to my advantage. Through panning and placement, and how I did the overdubs, I could create a kind of depth of field from low-tech meeting high-tech.

How did "Soundtrack Life" originate, and how did you develop those complex chord sequences that the solos weave through?

I tracked that in 2017 with Chris Maresh on bass and Wayne Salzmann on drums. It was one of those songs that came pretty quickly to me. I was playing guitar in the style of hitting bass notes while playing rhythm parts on top; I think it was a continuation of some of the picking patterns I used on a song called "Brilliant Room" [*from 2009's* Up Close]. I wanted to do that same kind of bass-rhythm thing. When I was overdubbing last year, the main melody part came pretty fast, but for the inside parts I had to work out some of those progressions where it changes chords quickly. I thought it would be cool if I played lead through those changes, but working it out was a bit of a challenge for me.

Tell us about creating "Yesterday Meets Today." The funky groove and your vocals take it in a pop/R&B direction, but then there's the awesome middle section that sounds so orchestrated.

Yeah, it's a different thing. That song is actually mostly new. It was a basic idea I had developed on electric piano. I cut it with Tom Brechtlein [*Al DiMeola, Robben Ford*] on drums, and I just kind of finished it out. The basic rhythm track of the piano was



“I WENT TO THE STUDIO AND STARTED GOING THROUGH MY TAPE VAULT AND FINDING BITS AND PIECES THAT WENT BACK ALMOST 25 YEARS”

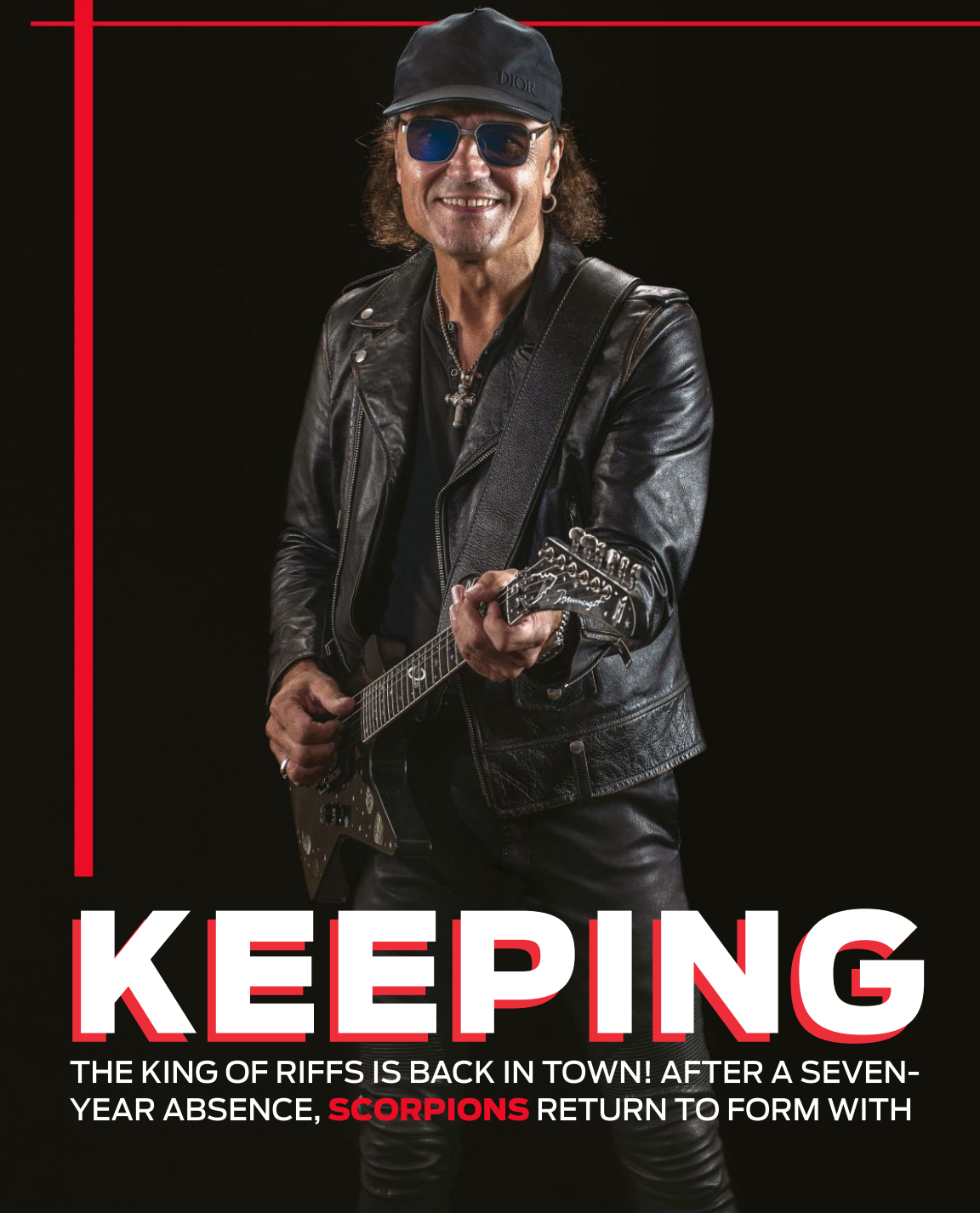
something I’d had for maybe a year or so, and I’ve never gotten around to recording it. I just wanted to add something to the record that had a little different vibe.

For the overdubs, did you purposely use certain amps to get sounds that would complement the old tracks?
Not really, because I’ve used the same thing all these years. I’ve used the same Twin Reverbs or Deluxe Reverbs for clean, and it’s always been old 50- or 100-watt Marshalls for lead tones. But for these recording I did use a Two-Rock Classic Reverb a lot. It’s like an overgrown Twin Reverb that has a little bigger sound, which is what I’m looking for in a dirty-rhythm tone. I set it where it’s just a little bit distorted — like if you listen to Hendrix playing “Like a Rolling Stone” on *Monterey Pop* when he wasn’t using the fuzz. That kind of tone, just a little bit distorted.

Did you use your replica Fender Virginia Strat for the overdubs?
Yeah, that’s what I used mostly, and it’s pretty much box stock. I think I might have used a ’57 Strat a little bit too.

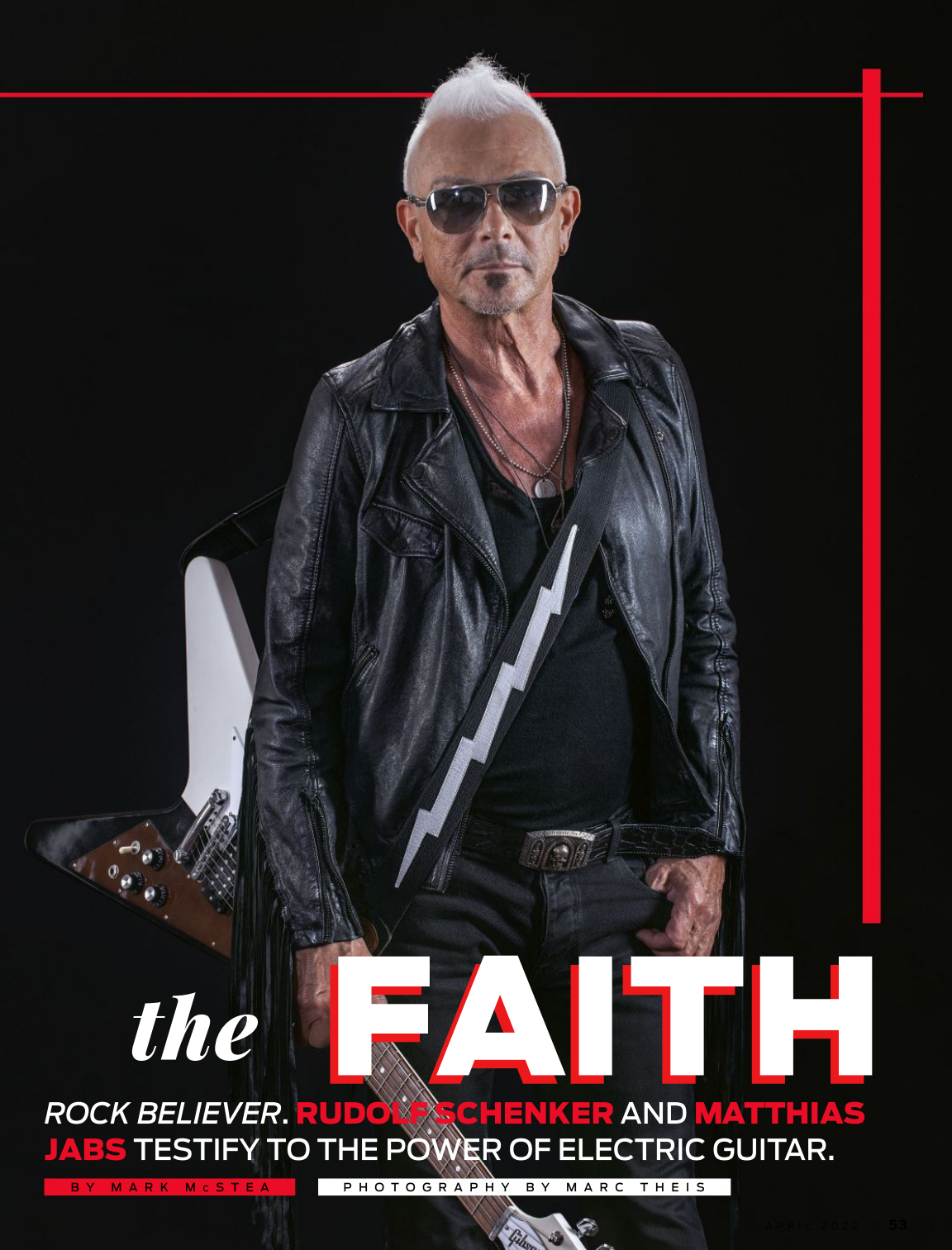
Have you had to push some of your perfectionist tendencies aside in order to bring songs to completion that might have remained unheard under normal circumstances?
You can do something over and over again until you get it perfectly good without it being as good as it originally was. I’ve suffered from that over the years. I think it comes from insecurity — like maybe you’re not quite good enough, so you have to patch and tape it all together to where it is good enough. But really, you have to come from a different place musically to where you just play and you’re not judging yourself all the time.

I think that was the beginning of me embracing that concept. I realized that to grow musically, you have to change your approach, and I needed to change my approach a little bit.



KEEPING

THE KING OF RIFFS IS BACK IN TOWN! AFTER A SEVEN-YEAR ABSENCE, **SCORPIONS** RETURN TO FORM WITH



the FAITH

ROCK BELIEVER. RUDOLF SCHENKER AND MATTHIAS JABS TESTIFY TO THE POWER OF ELECTRIC GUITAR.

BY MARK McSTEA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARC THEIS

ROCK BELIEVER, SCORPIONS' new album, has been a long time coming. It's their first release in seven years, since 2015's *Return to Forever*, and, happily, it is exactly the record Scorpions fans would want, bringing elements of their most successful albums, 1979's *Lovedrive* and 1984's *Love at First Sting*. As it happens, that was no accident. The band deliberately set out to channel the forces that were at work back then, even resorting to using the same guitars and amps that were used on those landmark Scorpions albums.

"IF YOU MAKE YOUR LIFE POSITIVE, IT STOPS YOU GETTING OLDER. IF YOU ARE MISERABLE, YOU WILL GET OLDER TOO FAST" — RUDOLF SCHENKER

With estimated total album sales of around 100 million, Scorpions are a huge live draw around the globe. Just ask rhythm guitarist Rudolf Schenker. "We've played in 88 countries," the founder of the German hard-rock group notes. "I remember James Hetfield being asked by an interviewer how many countries Metallica had played in, and he replied that he wasn't sure, but he knew it wasn't as many as Scorpions."

Schenker and Scorpions singer Klaus Meine may be well into their 70s, but they are showing no signs of slowing down the pace of their live work. The band were in the middle of intensive rehearsals when *Guitar Player* tracked down Schenker and lead guitarist Matthias Jabs to discuss the new album. They were in fine spirits, overflowing with enthusiasm for the record and the chance to get back onstage.

Rock Believer is one of the strongest records in your catalog. What accounts for that?

Matthias Jabs I'm really delighted with the result. The circumstances were different from how we recorded in the past, because the pandemic forced us to work by ourselves, as the producer that we'd chosen couldn't come to Germany, and we couldn't go to L.A. We decided that we'd have to produce it ourselves, but that turned out to be the right move, because we had no outside influence and could really concentrate on doing exactly what we wanted to do.

Rudolf Schenker Yes, we were in our own bubble in the studio, and we could work on it as long as we wanted — but without overworking it, which can sometimes be a problem. We knew exactly what we wanted though, which was to capture the DNA of [*1982's*] *Blackout* and *Love at First Sting*.

It's very much the record every Scorpions fan would want to hear.

Schenker We wanted to make a rock album that was not too polished. We wanted to go back into the center of what Scorpions should be, because sometimes we have been a bit too polished. We wanted to make a rock album for the rock community.

Jabs I think so too. Looking back, I think we found our signature sound in the early '80s, and you can hear, without any outside influence and advice from producers, that is still what we sound like.

The production is very raw, and also live sounding.

Schenker I think the fact that we played live in the studio contributed a lot to that raw sound.

Jabs I agree. I think the way that we recorded it is the best way to do it. Bands tend to use programmed drums and fly things in, and we've done the same things ourselves on recent albums. But the fans told us that it doesn't have the liveliness of older records when we record that way. We made *Rock Believer* like we made *Love at First Sting*, where we were all standing in the room, all playing the basic tracks live.

This is the first studio album that you've recorded with Mikkey Dee behind the drums. How did he affect the band's sound?

DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE AND LEFT: Rudolf Schenker and Matthias Jabs onstage at FivePoint Amphitheatre, Irvine, California, September 2, 2018

Schenker I think Mikkey plays very slightly in front of the beat, like me, and this gives a very live feeling to the songs, because there it feels like the beat is almost being pushed. When everything is perfect, it is boring. [*laughs*] Mikkey has a special kind of attack, and I think we bring the same feeling, which sounds very natural for Scorpions.

Jabs He's a really good drummer, which helps recording everything live. He has a really positive personality and he's great to hang with, so he brings a great vibe to the recording process. He has a lot of energy. You can play for eight hours, and he never tires out.

What was the songwriting process like?

Schenker We wanted to make the album without any outside writers. Greg Silverman, who was originally scheduled to produce before the pandemic hit, made suggestions for a couple of songs, so we gave him a credit, but otherwise everything — the writing, playing and producing — was done by the band. The good thing with this album is that Klaus wrote the lyrics first, which we've never done before. The lyrics were very inspiring. I was living in Thailand when he was sending me the lyrics, and I would drive around, picturing how the songs should sound, remembering the way we would feel when we were playing live and touring.

Jabs Rudolf will prepare a basic demo — the chord changes and sometimes a riff — and then we all work on them to turn them into the final song. I will come up with guitar arrangements and some riffs as well. When we are all standing together working on the songs, it's easy to come up with ideas and try them out right away. We know immediately what works. Mikkey always insists that we have proper endings to the songs, so that is something we also have to work on.

The opening track, "Gas in the Tank" is really hard hitting, yet very commercial. There's a great line in there: "The king of riffs is back in town." The solo really lifts the track even further.

Schenker Yes that is a great line. [*laughs*] It is so positive, everything is like it was in the '80s for us musically at the moment. We are so positive and enthusiastic.

Jabs I wrote the riff for the solo part first, then I worked on the solo. The sound you can hear at the beginning is a battery-powered drill. [*laughs*]

Several of your solos feature harmonized parts. How will you do those parts live?
Jabs I will play the solo, as I've done on previous harmonized solos, and our front-of-house mixer will bring in a harmonizer on key parts of the solo, at peak spots, so it gives the impression that the whole thing is in harmony.

The title track, "Rock Believer," looks like it will be a live anthem.
Schenker Yes, because we are rock believers. I've been a rock believer for over 60 years. [*laughs*] We've got three generations of rock believers now around the world. A large percentage of our fans are under 28.
Jabs Actually, the demo for this was very mellow, a little like the first verse, but for the whole song. I thought if we're going to call it "Rock Believer," then it should rock. I changed the intro, the riff and the riff under the solo. I think it gave the song a totally different sound.

ABOVE: Scorpions in 1983
BELOW: Jabs with his signature Gibson Explorer

"Seventh Son" has an interesting mix of guitar sounds. There is a hint of "Kashmir" about it.
Schenker There is. "Kashmir" is a fantastic song. When a song goes really deep inside you, sometimes some elements of it will come out in something that you write years later. I think "Seventh Son" shares some of that great atmosphere of "Kashmir." In 2016 I was onstage in Tokyo with Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck, and I said to Jimmy afterward that he inspired me to write "Still Loving You" because of "Stairway to Heaven."
Jabs There is a hint of "Kashmir" and also a song we did in the '80s called "China White." "Seventh Son" is like a collage of slide guitar and regular playing. It's important that you find the right stuff to keep the momentum and the atmosphere when you're creating guitar parts. Sometimes a regular guitar solo doesn't really cut it, so you have to find something different to lift the song. It was important to keep the mysterious feel of the track. We'll definitely be playing this song live. It has a very heavy feel. The new songs sit so well with our classics that we've ended up adding six songs from the album to our live set while we've been rehearsing.

What did you use to record the album.
Schenker I mostly used the guitars and amps that I used in the early '80s — 50-watt Marshalls, the '58 Flying V that I've used for years. It's an unbelievable-sounding guitar.
Jabs Guitar-wise, I used my old Les Pauls. I have a '58 and a'59, and I also use a '55 Junior with P-90s for rhythms. I also used my old Explorers and Strats that I used on the '80s records, plus all the old amps and cabs as well, like my old Soldano amp and a Fender Tonemaster. I also used a '61 Vox AC30, which I bought during the recording because I wanted something super clean.

I think the way that you get to the point with your solos, without overstaying your welcome, keeps a lot of the vitality and the urgency of the songs.
Jabs Exactly. It was always my goal that the guitar solo should give the feeling of the song continuing, even if it's on a different level, rather than it sounding like it's gone into an instrumental phase. The solo should be part of the music, and that's what I always

MARC THEIS (JABS); CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (1983)

end up going for. There should be some melody that is a reminder of the main melody of the song. It is much harder to play a great guitar solo in eight bars than it is if you've got three minutes.

You announced the farewell tour in 2012, yet here we are 10 years later. What was the reason for that?

Jabs When we announced it, we were serious about it, but a couple of weeks into the tour — I think it was at the airport in Lisbon — I asked Klaus, "Who thought of the idea to call this the farewell tour?" He told me he didn't know. I was so surprised because I thought it was him, as he is the oldest of us. It turned out nobody in the band knew — everyone I asked thought it was someone else in the band. [*laughs*] Turns out it was the management, who were thinking that, with Klaus and Rudolf in their mid '60s, they'd want to stop by the time the tour ended a couple of years later. As soon as we played the "last" show, we got the call to do *MTV Unplugged*. I went to Stockholm several times to arrange the *Unplugged* concert, and that kicked us back into things.

Schenker *Sting in the Tail* was a great album, but our management thought maybe we couldn't top it. As Matthias said, the *MTV Unplugged* invitation really made us have a think about our music. We'd always wanted to do it for years but had never been able to fit it into our touring schedule. I think it made it seem obvious that we should carry on.

Michael Schenker attacks the band, and you, Rudolf, on a frequent basis in interviews. Does that bother you much?

Schenker I tell you one thing: I love my brother. He can say whatever he wants to say. He's an amazing guitar player, an amazing person — whatever he wants to say, why not say it? [*laughs*] If that is what makes him happy, then okay. I wish him all the best. I think, sooner or later, we will all be friends again and we will play together again. My life is too happy to put myself into a dustbin over it. I want to live in the sky. I am so happy for my life. [*laughs*]

Jabs That's fine for you, but I think it's pretty dumb of him to keep doing that. It's not smart at all. I feel that airing whatever you might think or feel about your family in public just shows a complete lack of style. You don't do that. And as a band, we don't care. I always had a good relationship with Michael, but when I hear things like this, I don't really want to have a relationship with him.

It's been 50 years since the first Scorpions album, *Lonesome Crow*. I'm sure you didn't think you'd still be discussing your music 50 years later.

Schenker I always believed in myself, the band and the future of rock — always. People in Germany would say to me that I was crazy, I was stupid to think that I'd be able to make a living doing this. People told me that I should get a real job, or else what would I do for a living when I was 40. I used to just say, "Fuck you." [*laughs*] I live for music, I love music. I never want to be part of a system, or a puppet. I was looking for the right chemistry, the right people, and when I found them I knew that we would be successful. We wanted to be like the Rolling Stones, traveling around the world and making music.

It is interesting, and a sign of your ambition, that you recorded all the songs in English from the start, with the clear intention of reaching a worldwide audience.

Schenker Exactly. The reason why I picked Scorpions for our name was because it was a good name that would be understandable in Germany — where we had to start — but also all around the world. That was why I didn't spell it with a *K*, which is how it is spelled in Germany, but with a *C*. It was not easy at first — we wanted to go

MARC THEIS

"IT IS MUCH HARDER TO PLAY A GREAT GUITAR SOLO IN EIGHT BARS THAN IT IS IF YOU'VE GOT THREE MINUTES" — MATTHIAS JABS

ABOVE: Performing at Bloodstock Festival 2019 at Catton Hall, England, August 11, 2019
BELOW: At AccorHotels Arena, Paris, June 26, 2018

outside of Germany, to the world. We played everywhere we could, every continent, every country, to show the world who we were and what we had. I always wanted to play in America. I remember telling [*producer*] Conny Plank, who wanted to sign us very early on in Germany, that we wanted to play in America, and Conny laughed, saying, "Don't you know how many great musicians there are in America?" I just said, "Fuck it! We're going to play there." [*laughs*] It took seven years before we did our first American shows in Cleveland, supporting AC/DC, Thin Lizzy and Ted Nugent.

What keeps everything fresh after so many years?

Jabs We enjoy what we're doing, and we have no plan B. [*laughs*] This is all we know. Now, after two years without concerts, I feel so desperate to get back out onstage again. We're definitely not tired, physically or mentally, and we really want to get back on tour and to play the new songs as well. It's great to get a chance to refresh the set list. We played the last set for over four years, so it's exciting to change things up.

Schenker And I would add, I enjoy my life; I enjoy my music; I am thankful for everything that I've got.

"I LOVE MY BROTHER. HE CAN SAY WHATEVER HE WANTS TO SAY. HE'S AN AMAZING GUITAR PLAYER, AN AMAZING PERSON"
— RUDOLF SCHENKER

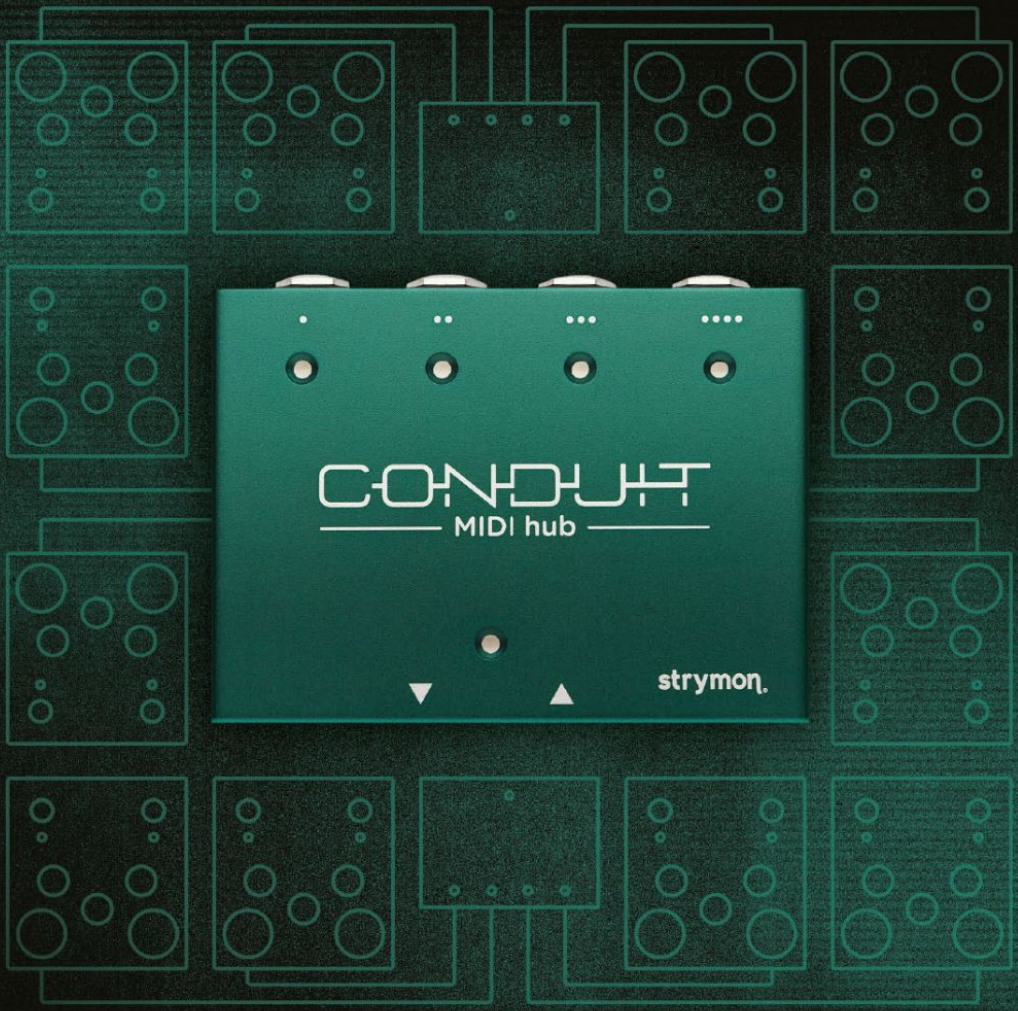
If you make your life positive, it stops you getting old. If you are miserable, you will get old too fast. We have an amazing new live set, we are fit enough, we've got a full tank of gas, and we will rock you like a hurricane. [*laughs*]

There was a long gap between the last album and this one. Do you anticipate the next record coming out over a shorter interval?

Schenker I don't know. To be surprised by life is the best thing that you can do. I think routine and too much planning breaks the feeling of surprise. I'm just going to be open to what happens.

Jabs I don't know when we'll do another one at this stage, but I do know that we won't make the same mistake again of announcing our last show or our last album. It's better to keep quiet. As far as I'm concerened, we've been on a very long encore.

KATJA OGRIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (TOP); DAVID WOLFF-PATRICK/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM)



SMALL BUT MIGHTY

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SEMI-HOLLOW VICTORY

In his new Rickenbacker history, Martin Kelly recounts the fascinating story of how luthier Roger Rossmeisl defined the look of Rickenbacker's classic electrics. His crowning achievement: the Capri series.

BY ROD BRAKES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLLY CURTIS & PHIL BARKER

RICKENBACKER HOLDS A unique seat in the pantheon of great American guitar builders. It was the first to introduce the electric guitar concept by taking it to market in 1932 following the development of the horseshoe pickup the year before. By the late 1950s, Rickenbacker's new owner, F.C. Hall, was keen to break into the thinline semi-acoustic market and would launch a series of guitars that have endured for more than six decades. Known as the Capri, this iconic design was a marvel of guitar craftsmanship when it arrived in January 1958. Furthermore, by a bizarre twist of fate, the very first Capri ever made — serial number V81 — ended up in the hands of John Lennon in 1960, changing the course of popular culture as a result.

It's a strange tale that bounces back and forth across the pond. Boiled down, it goes like this: A German-born luthier by the name of Roger Rossmeisl (1927–1979) emigrates to America, teams up with Rickenbacker in California and designs a new style of electric guitar. His debut model is by chance shipped back to his homeland, where 20-year-old Lennon finds it for sale in a Hamburg music store. He buys this now historic Capri — a 325 model — and within a few years the world is gripped by Beatlemania. Subsequently, demand for Rickenbackers explodes. Augmented by a plethora of British Invasion bands toting Capris imported by U.K. distributor Rose-Morris, Rickenbacker's place in history is cemented. But who was Roger Rossmeisl, and how did this all begin?

"BY A BIZARRE TWIST OF FATE, THE VERY FIRST CAPRI EVER MADE ENDED UP IN THE HANDS OF JOHN LENNON"

"Roger Rossmeisl was born in Germany, where his father, Wenzel, a jazz musician, was making guitars throughout the 1930s," begins Martin Kelly, whose new book, *Rickenbacker Guitars: Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fireglo*, has recently set the guitar world alight with its definitive account of the company's colorful history, accompanied by incredible photography courtesy of his brother, Paul Kelly.

"During the war," the book continues, "Roger was sent to safety in Schönbach, Austria, where, between the age of 12 and 18, he learned the art of guitar making under the tutelage of a guy called Franz Hirsch. He returned, fully trained, to Berlin after the war and set up shop working alongside his father making jazz guitars under the Roger brand. They were producing beautifully made guitars, but in post-war Germany materials were in desperately short supply and it wasn't long before Wenzel was caught smuggling materials in from the communist-controlled East. He was sentenced to four years in prison and Roger was left holding the baby.

"After a couple of years running the company alone, Roger hit money problems and wrote to Gibson in Kalamazoo, where [*company president*] Ted McCarty offered him a job, so [*in 1953*] he packed up shop and emigrated to the U.S. Unfortunately, things didn't work out at Gibson. Ted was less than impressed with an acoustic guitar Roger

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

This 1960 Deluxe model 360F is one of the lesser-seen Full Body variants.

F-BODY GUITARS

A RICKENBACKER FOR THE JAZZ GUITARIST

"These rare variants of the Capri range were aimed at the jazz market. The F-body [*Full Body*] guitars share the same outline as late-'40s Roger guitars. I'm sure Roger was fond of that design and thought, Why not recycle it? Roger guitars were all hand-carved and therefore time-consuming to build, whereas the F-body Rickenbackers have flat tops and flat backs.

"In '59, Rickenbacker stopped hollowing these out and they switched to gluing pre-cut sides. If you think of the size of that body, hollowing it out would have taken a long time — significantly more time than it would take to hollow out a regular-sized Capri. When they moved to glued sides, the pitch of the neck became a lot flatter and more in line with the body.

"In 1966, Dick Burke reshaped the body to make it fatter, and the pickguard changed from a teardrop to a kidney-bean shape. To my mind, it's a much less attractive guitar by the late '60s. I think the earlier ones are a lot more stylish.

"Paul Weller played an F-body in the Style Council quite a bit, and Jimmy Bryant used one to amazing effect. You can hear it on his early '60s records."

built, which had a thick carved top, and there was still a lot of anti-German feeling among some of the staff during the post-war years. So Roger split for sunnier climes and a stint playing Hawaiian guitar on a cruise ship on the West Coast, eventually ending up in Los Angeles where he landed a job at Rickenbacker [*in early '54*]. I don't doubt he'd knocked on Leo Fender's door as well, but it was Rickenbacker who gave him his first real break."

In 1962, Rossmeisl joined Fender, where he developed several new guitar designs, beginning with the brand's first foray into acoustics ("Very underrated guitars!" Martin says). But his most enduring contribution to the Fullerton firm's catalog is the Thinline Telecaster released in '68, a design that evolved directly from his efforts at Rickenbacker.

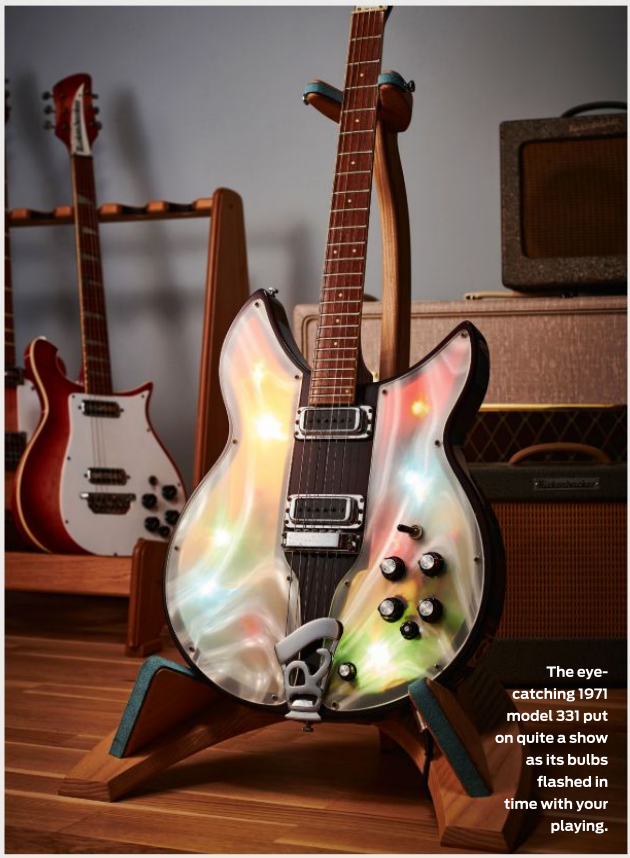
"The Capri design is essentially a solidbody hollowed out from the rear with the back glued on, very much like the Telecaster Thinline," Martin says. "In fact, the Telecaster Thinline is very much

"ROSSMEISL HAS GIVEN SO MUCH TO THE GUITAR WORLD THAT PEOPLE TAKE FOR GRANTED"

a Rickenbacker made by Fender, because that's what Roger went over there and did! The Thinline and Fender Coronado — also designed by Rossmeisl — even sport the same stylized f-holes seen on Roger guitars from the '40s right through to Rose-Morris Rickenbackers. It's Roger Rossmeisl all the way. Roger has given so much to the guitar world that people take for granted. And there's probably more we don't know about."

It should be pointed out that the Fender–Rickenbacker connection goes further back than to Rossmeisl's appearance. After Rickenbacker's co-founder Adolph Rickenbacher made it known to Fender partner F.C. Hall that he was preparing to retire, the astute businessman bought the firm in December 1953, much to the chagrin of

Rickenbacker



The eye-catching 1971 model 331 put on quite a show as its bulbs flashed in time with your playing.

LIGHT SHOW GUITARS

THIS PSYCHEDELIC RICKENBACKER WAS BLOWING MINDS — AND LIGHT BULBS.

"Based on the 330, the 331 Light Show Guitar is part of the Capri series," Martin tells us. "Rickenbacker also made a 4005LS bass and the 331-12 [*12-string*]. Roger McGuinn had one of only two 331-12s that were made. The idea was taken to F.C. Hall in 1969 by a couple of guys called Stephen Woodman and Marshall Arm. Hall was always keen on bringing in new ideas and the pair suggested, 'What about making these speaker cabinets with lights inside them? They flash in time with what you're playing.' F.C. then suggested, 'Yeah, that's cool, but what if you put the bulbs inside the guitar?' And that's how the Light Show Guitar was born.

"Depending on what you're playing, certain light bulbs will flash, which is quite a laugh if you're running up a scale or something. They do work, but they're incredibly temperamental and, unfortunately, the bulbs don't tend to last. As you can imagine, they're fraught with peril. Light Show guitars were only built for a year to 18 months, but they stayed on price sheets a fair bit longer. They had limited appeal at the time and sold in relatively low numbers."

his Fender colleagues. Having been involved with Fender since the mid 1940s, Hall was ultimately frozen out of the company in 1955.

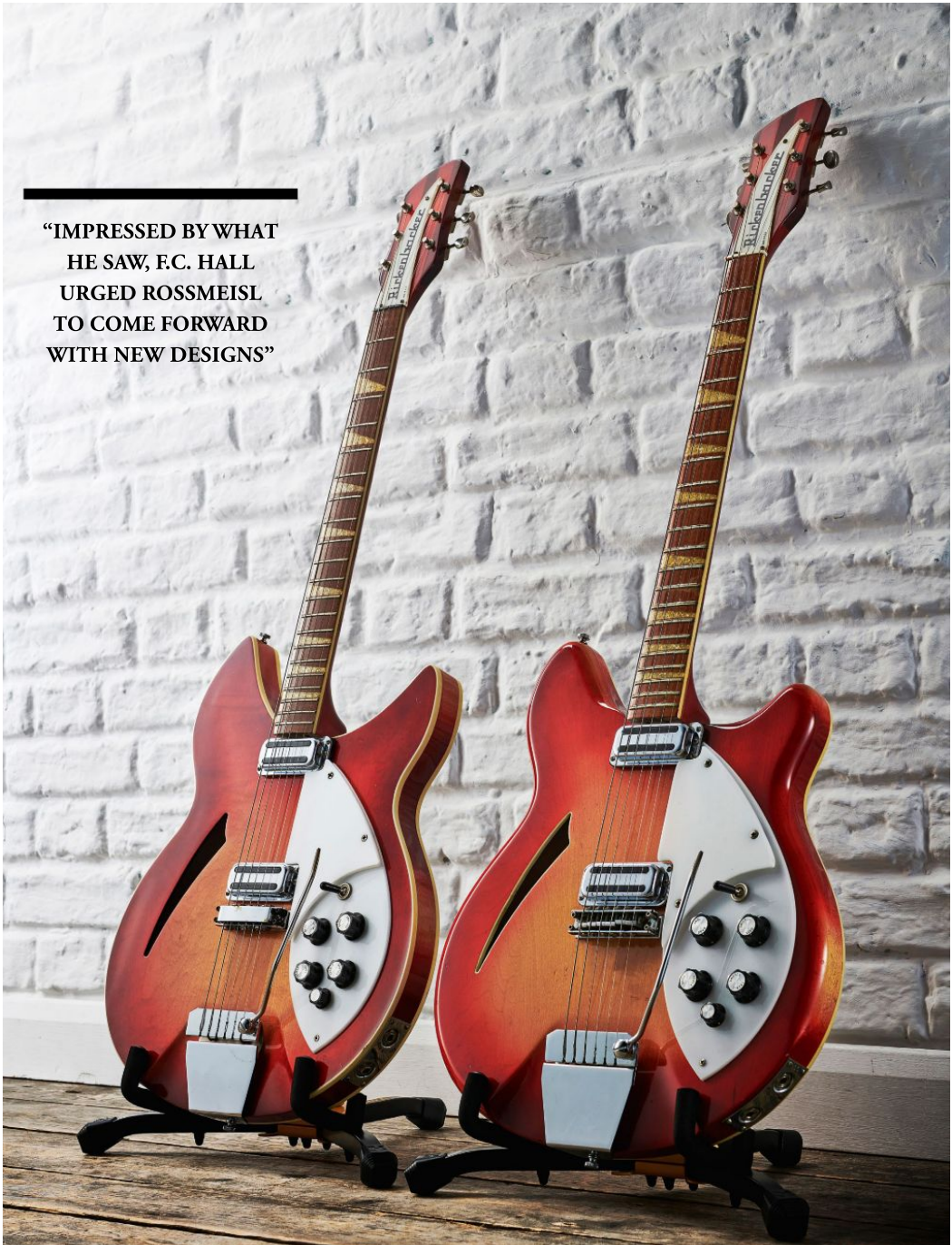
"F.C.'s role in Fender had been seriously diluted by 1953, and he clearly wanted something he could call his own," Martin says. "He definitely had his eyes on the prize. The electric-guitar market was beginning to explode, and F.C. wanted his own piece of the action."

Having acquired Rickenbacker, Hall approached an industrial designer named Hunt Lewis in order to produce a brand-new Spanish-style electric guitar. The instrument's blueprint is dated April 1954 and depicts a solid construction hollowed out from the front, with a glued-on top. This design effectively laid the groundwork for Rossmeisl's refinements once he came onboard two months later.

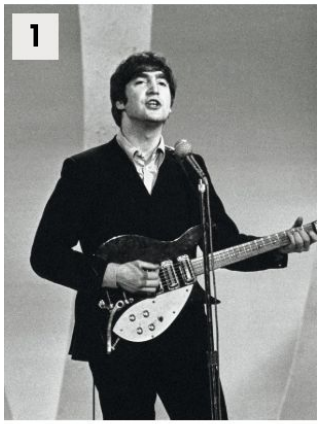
"The genesis of the Capri range stems from the early Combo 600 and 800 models designed by Hunt Lewis," Martin says. "Lewis wasn't a guitarist and looked at the guitar in the way an industrial designer might. He came up with the idea of making the body from a hollowed-out solid block of wood, something Roger hadn't previously done. Hunt's original design shows the body being hollowed out from the front, with a top being glued on. But when Roger arrives a few weeks later, he makes changes. For example, he hollows from the reverse side, putting a German carve into the top. Roger finesses the design somewhat, he changes the cutaway and the headstock shape, but the principle of taking a solid block and hollowing it out remains. No one else was making guitars that way. Although you get chambered bits on a Gretsch or Les Paul, it's not the same as being completely hollowed out."

During his first few years at Rickenbacker, Rossmeisl was mostly working to a brief while introducing his own embellishments. Impressed by what he saw, by 1957 F.C. Hall was urging him to come forward with new designs.

"The Capri series evolved from the Combo series," Martin says. "The Capris were the first truly semi-acoustic guitars that Roger made with sound holes. He



"IMPRESSED BY WHAT HE SAW, F.C. HALL URGED ROSSMEISL TO COME FORWARD WITH NEW DESIGNS"



1. John Lennon with his model 325, serial number V81, the first Capri ever made
2. Paul Weller playing a 330 with the Jam in 1977. Says Martin Kelly, "I wouldn't dare count how many guitars Weller has sold for Rickenbacker!"
3. Later stripped of its black refinish, John Lennon's 1958 model 325 Capri was the first in the initial batch made with solid tops. F-holes were added thereafter.

advanced the process to make the guitars super lightweight by taking a lot more wood out. The top and sides are one piece, and he'd hollow right through for the slash [*cat's-eye*] sound hole. Then he'd glue a piece of wood on the back.

"By 1957, F.C. was letting Roger off the leash a little, and that's when you really begin to see the flair and flamboyance of his designs. It's when the company's brand identity really takes shape. You see several ideas creeping in that Roger had developed in Germany — triangular markers, slash sound holes, deluxe binding. All these things that he'd been using before suddenly start coming into the picture.

"If you look at late-'40s Roger guitars, you'll see numerous connections with his Rickenbacker designs. Take the laminated necks, for example — that's something Roger was doing earlier, which he carried over to Rickenbacker. Strips of contrasting wood not only made the necks stronger but gave them an upmarket appeal. There are lots of other details that are similar to Roger guitars, like the fingerboard bindings, 'R'-tailpieces, headstock shapes… But he refined it all at Rickenbacker."

Though Roger employed a high level of craftsmanship, the carving of tops was a relatively time-consuming process. Naturally, F.C. Hall required more turnover. "It was in this moment that things start coming together," Martin says. "That's when the Capri range was really born. One of the things Roger had brought over from Germany was carved tops. Most early Combo models featured the German carve; it was not only time-consuming but kept prices higher than the competition. F.C. was clearly requesting to 'speed production up' and that's when you start seeing the flattop Ricks. The first prototype for the Capri range, known as the Polynesian, did indeed have a carved top, but by the time production commenced and Roger built Lennon's V81, the carved-top idea had been abandoned and all Rickenbackers from that point, bar a few specials, featured flat tops.

"F.C. immediately saw the potential of the new range and named it 'Capri' in honor of the family cat. There were just six 325s made with solid tops like Lennon's, but after those first six, Rossmeisl started cutting f-holes into the short-scale Capris."

Having created the short-scale 325 in January '58, Rossmeisl continued to evolve the Capri body shape. Via three "long-body" prototypes, he came to the full-scale 300-series Capri dimensions.

"Roger stretched the dimensions of the 325 body design lengthways, then sideways," Martin says. "That's how he arrived at the classic late-'50s style Capri. In '61, he redesigned the Capri again, dropping the waist and filling out the body horns. It's a subtle but very dramatic change. There were hints of it coming, but the Capri range with its extreme cutaway really defined the iconic Rickenbacker look — and the company's image for decades to come."

Rickenbacker Guitars: Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fireglo *by Martin Kelly and Paul Kelly is available via Phantom Books,* ***phantombooks.com***

PAUL POPPER/POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES (LENNON); IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (WELLER); NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (LENNON 325)

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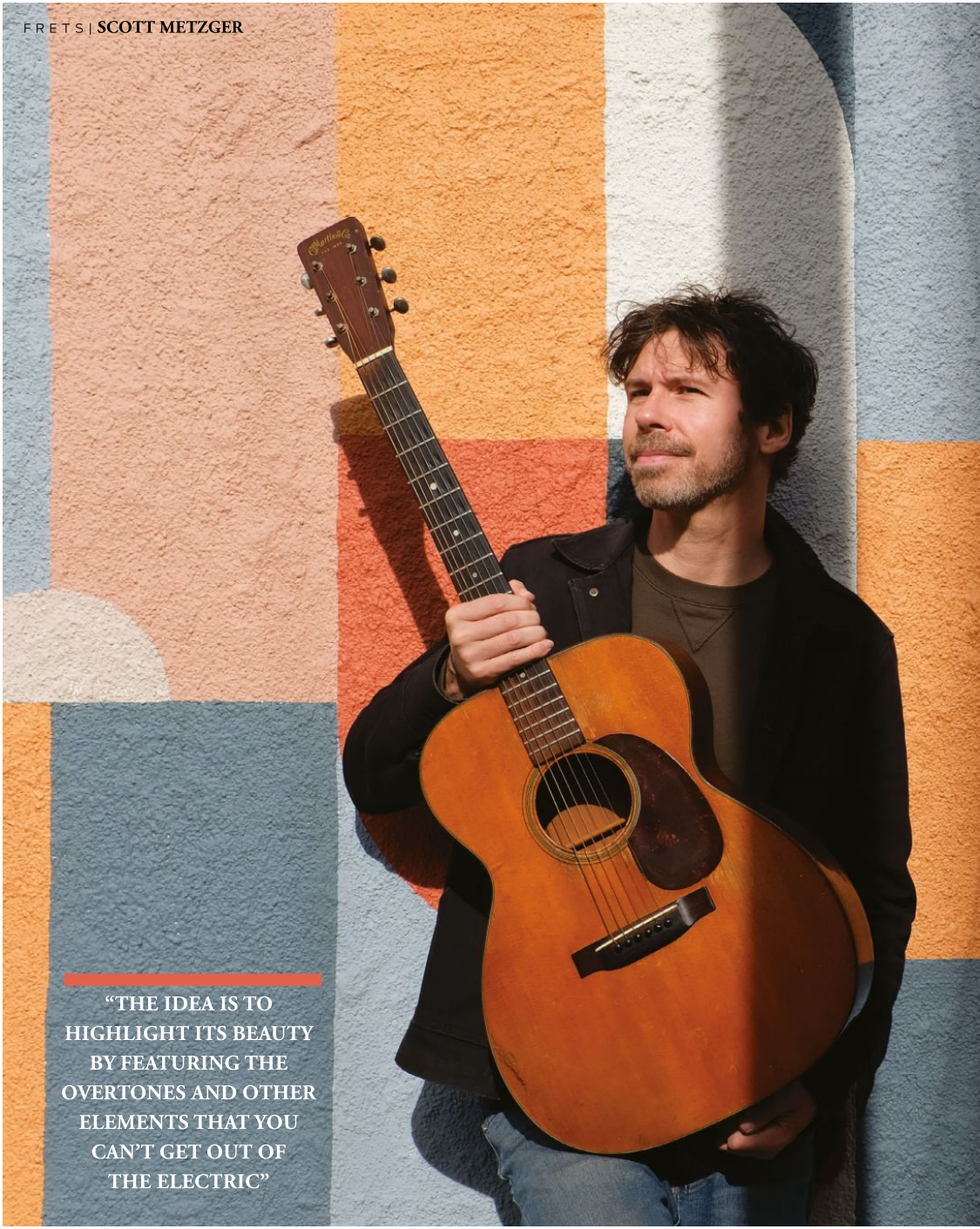

"THE IDEA IS TO HIGHLIGHT ITS BEAUTY BY FEATURING THE OVERTONES AND OTHER ELEMENTS THAT YOU CAN'T GET OUT OF THE ELECTRIC"

AMERICAN BEAUTY

Armed with a vintage Martin, jam-jazz cat **Scott Metzger** steps out with *Too Close to Reason*, an intimate solo debut that highlights the acoustic's unique charms.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY HESS

SCOTT METZGER IS known for kicking out Grateful Dead grooves and whooping up cosmic electric licks in Joe Russo's Almost Dead tribute act, as well as jamming with improv maestros like Nels Cline and John Scofield. But when the live scene went dark due to COVID, Metzger followed a vintage Martin down an acoustic rabbit hole to create a cool, understated solo album. *Too Close to Reason* (Royal Potato Family) is mostly moody and spacious, rather than chock full of burning chops, although Metzger is capable of conjuring fire. Check into the Showdown Kids to hear his proficient gypsy jazz hands, as well as those of his violinist wife, Katie Jacoby, who also happens to hold down the fiddle gig in a little British Invasion band from London led by Pete Townshend. To hear Metzger's electric howl, turn an ear to his power trio WOLF! On the other hand, his new solo acoustic album is a truly singular effort. He plays every note, except for Jacoby's delicate violin on "Only Child."

Too Close to Reason is simply a lovely listen, and a departure from run-of-the-mill guitar showcases. Metzger is not trying to juggle five parts simultaneously or worried about pulling it all off alone onstage. To cut the album, he simply followed his acoustic muse, either melodically or rhythmically, and then typically threw in a complementary track, plus another for texture. The result is kind of like a duo with himself, with some sauce on the side.

It's refreshing to hear an electric player taking a stab at an unplugged album in his own style, completely for its own sake. Performed with a plectrum, Metzger's effort falls outside the realm of flashy fingerstyle fabulosos or the jam-jazz world he usually inhabits. The first single, "Don't Be a Stranger," is a slice of Americana built on a lilting melody that downloads direct to memory. "Café Hidalgo" is a haunting minor mystery, and "When Katie Smiles" is classically inspired. Metzger excels at playing in 3/4 time, and the latest release, "Waltz for Beverly," has a wistful bounce.

How does your acoustic approach compare to electric?
The acoustic is a completely different instrument that has to be approached completely differently, but hopefully I have a similar voice on both. I try to incorporate more open strings and let them ring out to maximize resonation on the acoustic. The idea is to highlight its beauty by featuring the overtones and other elements that you can't get out of the electric.

Two of your primary influences, Django Reinhardt and Jerry Garcia, blurred the lines between acoustic and electric styles. How did you get into Django?
I got to Django through the jazz players I admired that he inspired. I grew up reading interviews with players like Jim Hall and Wes Montgomery, who would mention Django, so I picked up one of his CDs. I think it was the third volume of *Djangology*, which was a lucky choice, because some of that stuff is stronger than others, and I fell in love with it immediately. The feeling of swing and forward momentum in the groove was unbelievable, and his control over the guitar seemed impossible, covering such wide spans with so many arpeggios and other methods on the fretboard. And then I found out he was doing it with only two fingers on his left hand, which led to more disbelief and deepened my obsession. I formed Showdown Kids with Simon Kafka on guitar and my wife, Katie, on violin essentially as a vehicle to get my version of gypsy jazz out of my system, because I love that music so much. It's a great way to blow off steam.

How awesome is it to have a wife that can play Stéphane Grappelli to your Django?
Well, that was a big moment in the courting process, I've got to be honest. When she picked up a violin and started playing the Grappelli solo on "Minor Swing," I was like, "Oh, wait a minute. This has potential." [*laughs*] I definitely did a double take.

What element of the Django inspiration carries over into your own album?
The biggest thing for me is the way he emotes. He could sound angry or gentle, or anything in-between. His ability to set the mood made it very obvious. It's in his approach to dynamics, his sense of rhythm and all of the fundamentals involved with playing the guitar. I don't think there's a better example of a player having mastered them all.

What do you love most about Jerry Garcia's playing?
Actually, Jerry would always mention Django Reinhardt in interviews as well, and I think it's the Django influence in his playing that I love most. That's obviously more apparent in his acoustic playing, due to the nature of the instrument, but I don't claim to be an expert on all things Jerry. I tread lightly when I get into Garcia's stuff. I tend not to study it too much because I do so much of it with Joe Russo's Almost Dead, and I don't want to end up sounding like a watered-down version of Garcia. I did get a chance to play his [*Doug Irwin–built*] Wolf guitar after it was auctioned off in New York City. Joe Russo put together a stacked lineup of players, including Nels Cline, John Scofield, Neal Casal, Cass McCombs and Tom Hamilton Jr. [*from Almost Dead*]. I remember that the guitar was very heavy, had a lot of switches and played great. It was amazing and nerve racking to hold such a piece of rock and roll history. All I could think about as it was handed off from player to player to take a solo was, I don't want to be the guy that drops it. [*laughs*]

"ALL OF THESE MELODIES ALMOST STARTED PLAYING THEMSELVES ON THIS GUITAR. I COULDN'T PUT IT DOWN, AND THERE WAS NOWHERE TO GO ANYWAY"

I had a chance to check out his 1943 Martin D-28 and had a similar feeling. Wasn't it a vintage Martin that triggered your recent run of acoustic material?
Yes. Around late May of 2020, when it became clear that I wasn't going to be touring that year, I decided it was a good time to fulfill a lifelong dream and add a nice vintage acoustic to my collection. I shopped around online a wound up buying a 1955 Martin 000-18 from Carter Vintage Guitars in Nashville. I live in Brooklyn, so the salesman played a few chords over the phone and sent me a photo. It sounded good and I thought it looked cool. I actually wanted an instrument that had been played and looked beat up, not some collector-grade guitar.

When I received the package, it was perfectly in tune right out of the case. The clear, chimey tone pops right out. It doesn't take much effort with the plucking hand to make it project. You can really feel the guitar doing its thing. All of these melodies almost started playing themselves on this guitar. I couldn't put it down, and there was nowhere to go anyway. I wrote over 30 songs within a few weeks.

Metzger (right) and Ben Combe (left) in the jam band Particle, performing with Joe Satriani and Robby Krieger, February 24, 2006

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC, INC/GETTY IMAGES

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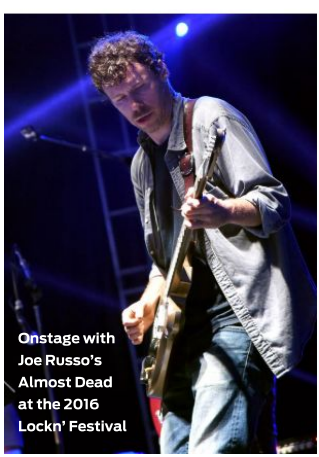
The most unusual song with the most unusual sound is actually the opening track, "Appropriate Wattage." Are you playing that acoustic with an EBow?
Yes, you're absolutely right, well, it's actually two acoustic guitars playing counterpoint off of one another. I used an EBow on both. There's no pickup, just a microphone in front of the guitar. To me, the sound is like when you rub your finger around the outside of a wine glass. It's a very pure, crystalized sound. Every now and again the string would catch the EBow a little bit and make a sharp, metallic sound. I liked the contrast of those two things. During the mixing process, [*engineer*] D. James Goodwin added in a lower-octave effect and drenched it in reverb. The concept was to have an off-center introduction that didn't really have anything to do with the rest of the record. The title comes from a conversation I had with Nels Cline about the appropriate amps to bring to a gig we were doing together.

The rest of the record has more of a rootsy vibe, and the first single, "Don't Be a Stranger," sounds like perhaps there's a bit of a Chet Atkins influence?
The melody is nice and simple, almost like a Christmas song that's hopefully catchy and has a bit of metric modulation in it on the back half. I was trying to highlight the dynamics of the guitar on the bridge. It's very quiet compared to the following melody as well as the outro, where there's certainly a Chet Atkins influence. I went through a very big Chet Atkins phase years ago, and while I would never try to make an entire record in that style, it's definitely a nod to that phase.



Onstage with Joe Russo's Almost Dead at the 2016 Lockn' Festival

You just released a video for "Waltz for Beverly." What's the story behind that tune?
I was kicking around that melody, which is like an Irish reel, with no harmony supporting it at all. So I put that down and then worked up some changes behind it. I'm not a huge fan of playing to a click track, but it was necessary for this situation in order to put the pieces together cohesively.

What's great about playing over a waltz rhythm?
The great thing about a waltz is that the feel can be either very sad or very happy. It can sound lonely or like you've got a spring in your step walking down the street, depending on the feel. I'd like to think "Waltz for Beverly" threads the needle between both of those. It's got a little bit of sentimental melancholy as well as a hopeful, very major diatonic sound. There are three tracks: one straight rhythm, one straight melody and then a third track for atmosphere, with lots of harmonics, open strings and clusters of very close-voiced chords ringing over the top.

"Only Child" is a lovely lullaby in waltz time with your wife Katie on violin, and "When Katie Smiles" has an interesting feel because it sounds like a waltz with a rest on the third beat, like two inside three, right?
Simon is going to play second guitar on the gigs I have coming up and he said the same thing, so there must be something to it, but I think of "When Katie Smiles" as being in four.

It's also interesting that the foundation sounds rather basic, and yet you play some of the most flowery melodies and almost classical-sounding flourishes over the top, wouldn't you say?
Sure. And a lot of the chords are slash chords [*with the bass note different from the root*]. I went to see the Who a bunch of times because my wife plays with them, and Pete Townshend uses so many slash chords in his writing. That influence definitely came through there. The single-note stuff you're talking about is playing upper harmonics and extensions over a different bass note [*than expected*].

How fun is it that you get to hang out at Who gigs?
It's unbelievable. I don't even know what to say. Sometimes I can't believe my life.

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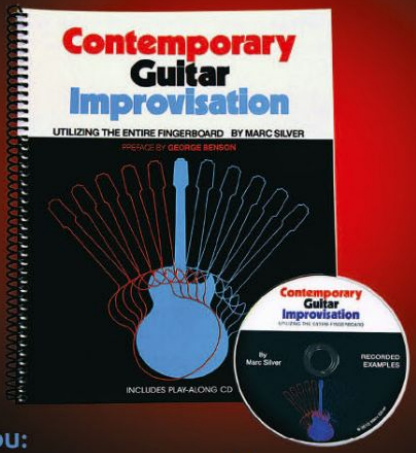

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CHROMATIC SEASONING

Learn how to use non-diatonic "outside" notes to add musical spice to melodic phrases in jazz and other styles.

BY SCOTT MERCER

AS WE IMPROVISE or compose melodies, we learn that repeating and developing a *motif*, or phrasing idea, can lend structural cohesion to the music and help it "make sense." It also can have the benefit of grouping notes into easily workable chunks. How we use scales to create these usable melodic fragments is a pretty wide-open topic. To the ear, playing the notes of the underlying chords, using arpeggios, will always sound correct and pleasing, and regardless of where you start within the framework of the key, your ear should guide you to those correct sounds, with the related scales tones serving as transitional "fill." For example, if we're in the key of C major, and the chord of the moment is Dm, playing a simple ascending fragment of the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B) starting on D renders the sound of the Dorian mode (D, E, F, G, A, B, C), which neatly agrees with the Dm chord and touches upon its structural notes — D, F and A. And if we move on to a G chord and continue to play within the C major scale, starting on G, that gives us the G Mixolydian mode (G, A, B, C, D, E, F) and the chord tones of G — G, B and D — which makes the note choices sound correct.

ONE WAY TO SPICE-UP A MELODY IS WITH *CHROMATICISM* — THE USE OF NON-DIATONIC TONES FROM OUTSIDE OF THE KEY YOU'RE IN.

This kind of methodical, *diatonic* (scale-based), "hit-the-right-notes" approach is all well and good, in terms of learning how to avoid stepping on harmonic-melodic landmines and hitting "bad" notes, but without any daring detours taken, it can make for a rather bland and "safe"-sounding melody that isn't very dramatic or compelling. One effective way to color and spice-up a melody to make it more interesting is to incorporate *chromaticism*, which refers to the use of non-diatonic tones from the 12-tone chromatic scale that are outside of the key you're in. A lot of improvisational studies in jazz education curricula teach you how to use all the notes in the chromatic palette and, in effect, make them all sound musically justified, usually through resolution, using the conceptual tactic of tension and release. Oftentimes a resolution is effectively achieved by moving from a chromatic, or "outside," note to a neighboring chord tone or related scale tone, as the ear ultimately gravitates toward pleasing, consonant sounds for a final or conclusive-sounding cadence.

In this lesson, I'll present some effective and useful options for injecting chromatic notes into otherwise diatonic lines, using motifs based on a

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foundational interval pattern, which will serve as our working template.

BROKEN THIRDS

Fig. 1 illustrates a one-octave fingering pattern and fretboard shape for the C major scale in 2nd position, which we will use as a starting point. **Ex. 1** shows the scale played in what's called a "broken-3rds" melodic pattern of eighth notes that groups the notes into pairs, or two-note "cells," and follows a climbing pattern that goes up two scale degrees — what's known as a 3rd interval, which can be either major (two whole steps) or minor (one and one half steps) — then drops back down one scale degree — what's known as a 2nd, which can be either major (one whole step) or minor (one half step) — before ascending another 3rd, ultimately rising through the scale.

ADDING CHROMATICISM TO A LINE LIKE THIS CAN GENERATE MELODIC MOMENTUM AND DRIVE AND MAKE IT SOUND MORE INTRIGUING

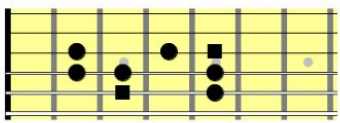
In bar 3, after reaching the octave C root note, the cell pattern reverses, and a cascading melodic contour unfolds, with the notes now going down a 3rd, up a 2nd, down a 3rd, up a 2nd, etc., which brings us back to our starting low C note. Notice that the exercise adds one higher note (D) and one lower note (B) to the shape shown in Fig. 1. This is done for the sake of making the line sound melodically complete.

Adding chromaticism to a line like this can generate melodic momentum and drive and make it sound more intriguing. So let's take this C major scale broken-3rds pattern and look at some ways to spice it up, or jazz it up, by applying targeted chromaticism.

Ex. 2 adds a chromatic "lower neighbor" approach tone to each cell that leads up to the first note and injects a moment of tension and release. Notice that, in doing this, we've also expanded each cell to three notes. Since we're still playing eighth notes, this creates an interesting rhythmic twist, as we now have a "threes-on-twos" syncopation pattern within the melodic contour, with shifting accents and the chromatic notes falling on varying beats and upbeats throughout the three-bar phrase.

Ex. 3 applies the same approach to the descending part of our original broken-3rds pattern from Ex. 1, again leading into each cell from a half-step below and creating an interesting rhythmic syncopation to go with the chromatic tension and release. Notice that we now have a repeated note in two spots, the E in bar 2 and the low B in bar 3. Also, due to the different melodic contour here,

Fig. 1

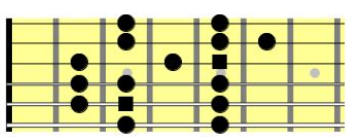


Ex. 1

Ex. 2

Ex. 3

Fig. 2



the chromatic notes function as passing tones.

Now, if we expand our foundational 2nd-position C major scale fretboard pattern to include all six strings, we get the larger note set and shape illustrated in **Ex. 4**, which now spans over two octaves, from a low G note to a high A. This pattern may also be thought of as the relative G Mixolydian mode, or, for that matter, any of the seven modes of the C major scale: C Ionian, D Dorian, E Phrygian, F Lydian, G Mixolydian, A Aeolian and B Locrian.

Fig. 2 shows the adding-lower-chromatic-neighbors device from Examples 3 and 4 now applied to our expanded six-string fretboard shape, both ascending and descending. Notice how, in bars 1–6, the chromatic pitches function as *approach tones*, and in bars 7–12 they serve as *passing tones*.

THE CELLS BEGINNING ON F AND C ARE APPROACHED BY A CHROMATIC PITCH ONE HALF STEP ABOVE THE TARGETED SCALE TONE, FOLLOWED BY THE DIATONIC PITCH ONE HALF-STEP BELOW. THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF *CHROMATIC ENCLOSURE*.

Taking the concept a bit further, we can create a three-note cell in which the third note reiterates the first. **Ex. 5** illustrates this idea, applied to the basic C-major-scale-in-3rds pattern from Ex. 1. Notice that the rhythmic motif for each cell is now two eighth notes and a quarter note.

If we were to connect the starting notes of these three-note cells with chromatic pitches, it would certainly add interest to the above line, as demonstrated in **Ex. 6**. Because the structure of the major scale includes some whole steps (two frets) and half

Ex. 4

Ex. 5

Ex. 6

steps (one fret) between adjacent notes, there are two techniques required to accomplish the chromatic connection. The majority of cells are connected by a chromatic passing tone: C - C♯ - D, D - D♯ - E. Others, namely the ones beginning on F and C, are approached by a chromatic pitch one half step above the targeted scale tone, followed by the diatonic pitch one half-step below. This is an example of an interesting melodic device known as *chromatic enclosure*, which has been widely used in classical music since the mid-19th century. That usage then influenced the vocabulary of jazz.

Ex. 7 replaces the eighth rests from the previous line with the missing second note of each three-note group from Ex. 5, keeping the chromaticism intact. **Ex. 8** applies the same device to a descending pattern, with descending chromatic passing tones now used.

CHROMATIC ENCLOSURE HAS BEEN WIDELY USED IN CLASSICAL MUSIC SINCE THE MID-19TH CENTURY AND INFLUENCED THE VOCABULARY OF JAZZ

We can replace the rests from the previous example with the second note of each three-note group, from bars 5–8 of Ex. 5, keeping the chromaticism intact, as demonstrated in **Ex. 9**.

PLAYING OVER CHORD CHANGES

Our next group of examples demonstrate how to apply these chromatic devices — approach tones, passing tones and enclosure — to changing chords, using parts of the chord progression to the jazz standard "Autumn Leaves." The first two examples are in the key of G major and follow a ii - V - I progression (Am7 - D7 - G). The final two examples are played in the relative minor key of E minor (per the tune's bridge section) and follow a ii - V - i progression in that key (F♯m7♭5 - B7 - Em).

Ex. 7

Ex. 8

Ex. 9

Ex. 10

Ex. 11

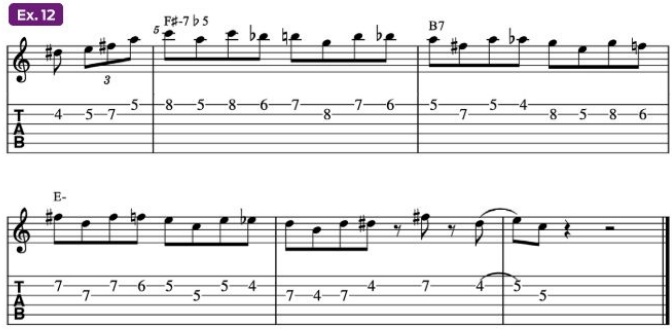
In **Ex. 10**, the first three bars utilize ascending elements from the basic concepts introduced in Examples 2 and 7, with some jazzy phrasing added (note the use of the eighth-note triplet in bar 1).

Ex. 11 is a descending phrase similar in construction to Ex. 3, and the descending E minor phrase in **Ex. 12** applies the concept from Ex. 9.

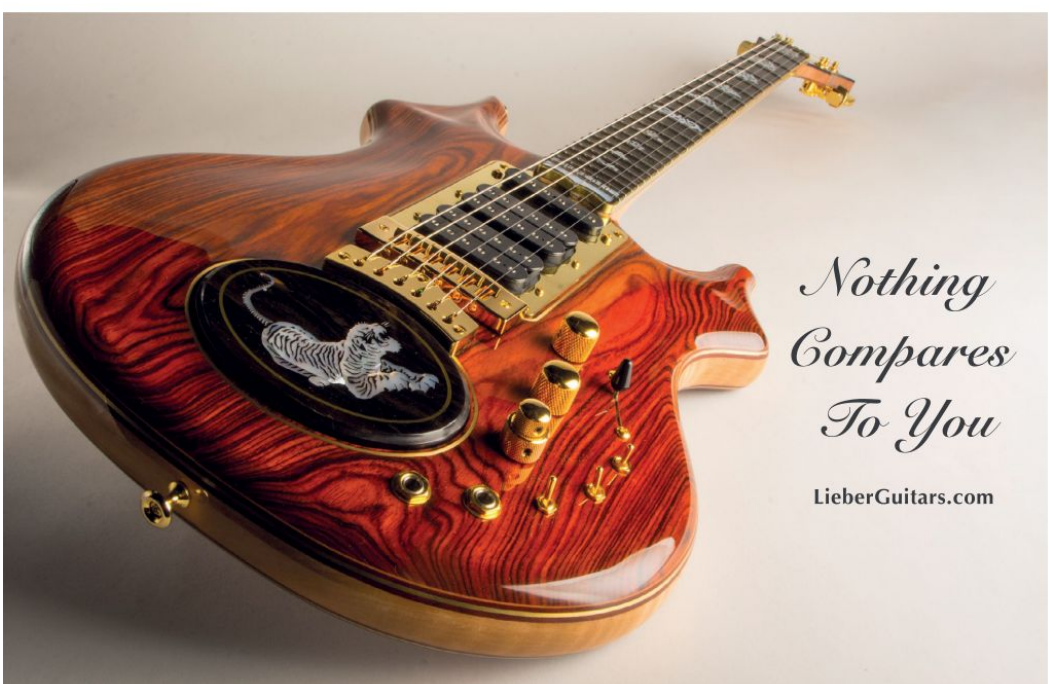
Finally, the line in **Ex. 13** takes the phrasing pattern from Ex. 2 and adds some interesting variation, by rhythmically displacing the three-note cell, so that the notes fall on different parts of the beat (beginning with the fourth note in bar 2).

I hope these chromatic concepts have given you some useful musical food for thought. Apply them to your own single-note lines and see what kinds of interesting variations you can come up with, using your ears to guide you.

Ex. 12



Ex. 13



Get It How You Can, Pt. 2

More acoustic insights from *The Beatles: Get Back*.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

LAST MONTH, WE delved into how the Beatles struggled to the breaking point over how to approach some of the more delicate tunes presented in the documentary *The Beatles: Get Back*. Acoustic arrangements that sound simple can actually be the most tricky to tackle, especially as a group. After George Harrison bails and ultimately rejoins the quartet, they finally figure out "Two of Us" and "For Your Blue," but one iconic song eludes them altogether.

ACROSS THE TUNE-IVERSE

Watching the Beatles try to figure out "Across the Universe" is fascinating. First they listen to an early version laid down at Abbey Road in February 1968. According to beatlesbible.com, the basic track has Lennon on acoustic and Harrison on tambura, an Indian drone instrument. As the group attempts a full electric arrangement in *The Beatles: Get Back*, it's cool to hear the song fleshed out with Lennon on his Epiphone Casino, Harrison playing his Les Paul with a wah pedal, and harmony vocals, on top of Paul and Ringo's rather plodding bass and drums. But what the somewhat discombobulated band brings to the table lacks the transcendent quality of the acoustic arrangement we know and love. The scene culminates with McCartney shouting, "I think you'd better take control, John!" He doesn't. Instead, they launch into Chuck Berry's "Rock and Roll Music." Next thing you know, they're playing around with a silly cut-time version. "Across the Universe" gets shelved.

Phil Spector ultimately turned the original version into a "wall of sound" production with strings and a choir. That wound up on *Let It Be*. The stark *Let It Be… Naked* re-imagining from 2003 proved the bare-bones original idea is still sturdy when "undressed," with Spector's embellishments removed. Sometimes less is more — all you need is a little acoustic love.

John Lennon in India, playing Donovan's Gibson J-45, March 1968

KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-KEYSTONE VIA GETTY IMAGES

CHANGE YOUR WORLD

There is much to learn by delving into "Across the Universe." The key is to play it in D, using the *Let It Be… Naked* version as a guide. The *Let It Be* mix is slowed down to D♭, while the first-released version — which appeared on *No One's Gonna Change Our World*, a 1969 album to benefit the World Wildlife Fund — is sped up to E♭. It's much easier to play in D, although the intro requires a bit of facility. It starts by jumping from an open D shape to the one at the 10th position, with a focus on strings one and three. It then falls back down to land on F♯min (use a wrapped thumb to keep the B string open for a toggle to F♯minsus4). Keep that B string open for the next move, toggling from A5 to Asus2, before resolving on open D. The rest is pretty basic stuff. The simple chord arrangement can be found online and includes lots of D and A chords, while the straightforward rhythm consists of eighth-note downstrokes. The foundation is rock solid, but the magic lies in how the ingenious melody flows through the simple chord structure.

"Across the Universe" is within reach for any decent singer, as the range isn't too broad and the melody winds around in small steps. For the vocally challenged, there are two paths. First, connect with a buddy to play the melody while you cover the chords, or perhaps bounce parts back and forth.

Second, for those with fingerstyle chops or some facility picking out chord melodies, this is an endlessly interesting tune to tackle solo, and a great one to use as a jumping off point for your own embellishment. Try working in three different ranges on the fretboard. Start in open position. Use your ear to follow the melody through the chords on the entire song. Want to take it to the next level? Jump to the fifth position starting with the second verse. Next level again? Try the 10th position, starting on the last verse. Throughout the tune, experiment with playing partial chords and leaving strings open where they work to add colorful suspensions.

I spent weeks working with "Across the Universe" after watching *The Beatles: Get Back*, and discovered new dimensions with each attempt. Visit guitarplayer.com when this column appears online for a video complement. May learning "Across the Universe" help you change your world for the better.

All apologies for mixing up my tonewoods last month when referring to Harrison's Telecaster, which was famously made of rosewood, not mahogany.

MAESTRO

FZ-M Fuzz-Tone, Invader Distortion, Ranger Over Drive, Comet Chorus and Discoverer Delay

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

(clockwise from top) The Maestro FZ-M, Ranger Over Drive, Invader DIstortion, Comet Chorus and Discoverer Delay

GIBSON LAUNCHED THE Maestro brand in 1962 and set the stage for stomp-box effects with its introduction of the FZ-1 Fuzz Tone, a two-knob box that etched its place in history thanks to Keith Richards' use of it in 1965 on "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," the Rolling Stones' first number one hit. Maestro went on to produce numerous products—including amplifiers — throughout the '60s and '70s before fading away in 1979. Now Gibson has revived the brand with a series of pedals for 2022: the FZ-M Fuzz-Tone, Invader Distortion, Ranger Over Drive, Comet Chorus and Discoverer Delay.

While only the FZ-M is actually based on anything Maestro originally did, these colorful pedals exude vintage-style graphics, including a "three bugles" bypass indicator that lights up in red, yellow and blue. All have three knobs, a two-position mode switch that performs different functions depending on the effect, true-bypass switching and a mechanical on/off foot switch. They feature analog circuitry, which is laid out on glass-epoxy boards, and the housings open up clamshell-style to make it easy to change the battery (a 2.1mm jack for an external adapter is also provided). All are priced at $149, except for the Discoverer Delay, which is $159.

The five pedals we received for this review came mounted on a steel board with "Maestro" emblazoned on it (a custom item that wasn't being offered at the time of this review), and were pre-connected with a Strymon Ojai supplying the juice. We tested the Maestros using a new Reverend Reeves Gabrels Dirtbike Royale with MojoTone hum-canceling P-90s [*see review, page 86*], a Hamer Newport with Duncan Phat Cat pickups and an early Gibson Johnny A, all running through either a Fender Deluxe Reverb reissue with Alessandro hand-wired circuitry or a Victoria Double Deluxe 2x12 combo with Celestial Heritage speakers.

FZ-M FUZZ-TONE

Envision for a moment how the original Fuzz-Tone could have evolved if Maestro had lasted beyond the late '70s, and the FZ-M comes pretty close to showing what might have been. The steel enclosure has the familiar wedge shape of the original, although it's a little larger and sports the colorful triangles-and-half-moon graphics (lime green in this case, and applied to a brushed-aluminum top) that distinguished Maestro products from the late '60s onward. This pedal has attack, level and tone knobs along with a two-position mini-toggle mode switch for selecting Classic and Modern sounds. This is an important feature, explains Craig Hockenberry, Gibson's director of engineering and lead designer of the revamped Maestro line. "The sound is based on the FZ-1A in Classic mode, and it uses discrete transistors, but it's actually more like a silicon version of the Maestro Fuzz-Tone, called the FZ-S. So it has certain aspects taken from that pedal, and it's the only one in the series that is based on anything Maestro had previously done."

OLLY CURTIS

In Classic mode, the FZ-M sounds like an early Fuzz-Tone, with its slightly scooped response and frazzy fuzz sound. The attack knob unleashes a goodly amount of sustain as it's turned up to where the playing feel is starting to get a little compressed, and by tweaking the tone control you can get everything from buzzy, '60s-style tone to softer flavors of grind that can sound almost sax-like with some judicious twiddling of the controls. The pedal's character changes when switched to Modern mode, which yields a midrange-forward tone that's both tighter on the bottom and smoother on top. This pedal also has a lot of output, so you can easily coax an amp into ballsy-sounding overdrive simply by keeping the attack on the low side and cranking the level control. A good all-around fuzz that can deliver circa-'60s tones as well as heavy rock grind, the FZ-M captures enough throwback vibe to make it fun while delivering tones that modern players will also dig.

INVADER DISTORTION

Moving further into distortion territory, the Invader is a high-gain machine that can cover a broad spectrum of distortion duties. Armed with gain, level and tone controls, this pedal also features a built-in noise gate that you can select with the Gate on/off mode switch. It's a feature mainly aimed at metal players who want fast note cutoff and overall control of noise when playing through high-gain rigs. The Invader's circuit uses discrete transistors and has multiple gain stages to obtain the high levels of distortion it can produce.

Pummeled though our relatively low-gain test amps, the Invader produced lots of distortion and tracked picking dynamics well, while providing sounds that were tight but not overly compressed. The grind comes on almost immediately as the gain knob is turned up, and by nine o' clock on the dial it's churning out fat distortion that sounded good for blues and classic rock. Things change at settings of noon and higher as the Invader gets into high gear, delivering gushing distortion with gobs of sustain. I also found that switching on the Invader with the Ranger pedal boosting the guitar signal was a cool way to get feedback that was controllable by adjusting your picking, even at very low volume. When activated, the Gate quickly clamps down as notes begin to fade, which is handy if there's a lot of noise buildup from pedals you're running, and you can adjust the threshold sensitivity via an internal trimpot to make the gating feel more natural.

The Invader is dynamically responsive and tracks guitar volume changes quite well at super-saturated settings. Its tone control is voiced for shred styles and has a fairly scooped curve when dialed fully left, and it doesn't add a lot of midrange color when turned in the other direction. But the EQ is accommodating to humbuckers and single-coils alike, and is totally in keeping with the Invader's bombastic attitude.

RANGER OVER DRIVE

The Ranger's mission is to push an amp (or pedal) into overdrive by hitting it with a hotter signal than the guitar can crank out on its own. Call it a booster if you will, but the Ranger definitely qualifies as a leave-it-on pedal, as its forte is adding beefiness without altering the fundamental sound of your guitar/amp rig.

The Ranger has gain, level and tone controls, plus a High/Low switch that lets you configure it for cool dirty-rhythm tones or more saturated lead sounds. It's not super gainy, but with the gain knob cranked in High mode, it does generate enough dirt on its own to get into the sonic zone of a vintage British amp pushed into distortion with a treble booster, offering a touch-sensitive response that's perfect for going from lead to rhythm by simply working the guitar volume and/or your picking attitude. As Craig Hockenberry points out, the Ranger is also the only pedal in the series that can be run at 12 volts, which increases headroom and gives a dynamic feel that's more akin to playing through a good tube amp. With the mode switch set to Low, you can leave the Ranger on full-time and get tones that react organically to your playing,

SPECIFICATIONS

FZ-M Fuzz-Tone
CONTACT maestroelectronics.com
PRICE $149

CONTROLS Attack, level, tone. Classic/Modern switch
SIZE 4.75" x 3.25"
I/O Front-mounted input, output and power-supply jacks
EXTRAS Unique "three bugles" bypass LED. Can operate on 9V battery

KUDOS Delivers vintage-style Maestro tone plus modern fuzz
CONCERNS None

SPECIFICATIONS

Invader Distortion
CONTACT maestroelectronics.com
PRICE $149

CONTROLS Gain, level, tone. Gate On/Gate Off switch
SIZE 4.75" x 3.25"
I/O Front-mounted input, output and power-supply jacks
EXTRAS Unique "three bugles" bypass LED. Can operate on 9V battery

KUDOS Wide gain range. Loads of distortion on tap.
CONCERNS None

SPECIFICATIONS

Ranger Over Drive
CONTACT maestroelectronics.com
PRICE $149

CONTROLS Gain, level, tone. High/Low switch
SIZE 4.75" x 3.25"
I/O Front-mounted input, output and power-supply jacks
EXTRAS Unique "three bugles" bypass LED. Can operate on 9V battery

KUDOS A great sounding boost pedal that can be operated at 12-volts for increased headroom
CONCERNS None

The "three bugles" bypass indicator lights up in red, yellow and blue.

A mode mini-toggle offers a function unique to each pedal.

The wedge-shaped steel enclosure recalls that of the original pedals.

cleaning up for quieter passages and summoning the grind when you need it. I liked keeping the Fender or Victoria "Deluxe" amps on the clean side and using it to inject just enough drive (with the gain knob set around two o'clock) to add a little dirt to rhythm parts, while keeping everything super clear and defined. Bottom line: The Ranger Over Drive is probably the best choice in the series for those who like to turn up the heat on a tube amp without changing its vibe.

SPECIFICATIONS

Comet Chorus
CONTACT maestroelectronics.com
PRICE $149

CONTROLS Depth, mix, speed. Orbit/Earth switch
SIZE 4.75" x 3.25"
I/O Front-mounted input, output and power-supply jacks
EXTRAS Level trimpot for the Orbit function. Unique "three bugles" bypass LED. Can operate on 9V battery

KUDOS Sweet sounding chorusing with a trippy vibrato function. Orbit mode adds tremolo. Quiet operation
CONCERNS None

COMET CHORUS

There's more than meets the eye with the Comet Chorus, with its basic complement of depth, mix and speed controls. The Maestro designers intended that this pedal offer a

SPECIFICATIONS

Discoverer Delay
CONTACT maestroelectronics.com
PRICE $159

CONTROLS Delay, sustain, mix. Mod On/Mod Off switch
SIZE 4.75" x 3.25"
I/O Front-mounted input, output and power-supply jacks
EXTRAS Internal trimpots for adjusting mod depth and speed. Unique "three bugles" bypass LED. Can operate on 9V battery

KUDOS Nice sounding analog delay with or without chorus. Quiet operation
CONCERNS No tap-tempo or provision for preserving delay tails when effect is bypassed

"different take on chorusing," and the Earth/Orbit switch is what makes the difference here.

As Hockenberry again explains, "A lot of choruses harken back to the '80s with that crystal-clear sound, and we wanted to allow some of that, but also add a different flavor. So in Earth mode, you have a pretty large swing of chorus effect via the depth control, but as you increase the depth setting you'll notice there's more modulation and a little pitchiness happening — that swirly thing that a lot of choruses intentionally push out. And then you can take it a step further when you kick it into Orbit mode, which adds amplitude modulation to create more of a rotary effect. You can dial in as much as you want with the trimpot inside, which is a level control for the Orbit and determines how deep you want the amplitude modulation to go. It's a cool pedal to explore."

The Earth mode does indeed provide a nice range of syrupy analog chorusing, up to the point where higher depth settings begin to take things in a more pitch-shifted direction, morphing from chorus into what sounds like vibrato. Turn the mix up to noon, add some drive from an amp or pedal, and the effect is pretty cool. Summon your inner Lonnie Mack and groove on the bent-pitch fun. Then, by switching to Orbit mode, you're

suddenly adding tremolo to the chorusing/vibrato, which is variable over a wide range with the speed control, and at whatever mix level you set via the internal trimmer. It's not exactly like having separate chorus and tremolo pedals, but the Comet does put more sounds at your fingertips than might be expected from a three-knob chorus pedal.

DISCOVERER DELAY

In designing a delay pedal to round out the series, Maestro chose to go fully analog with the Discoverer and take advantage of what bucket-brigade technology has to offer. "We really wanted to lean into the analog aspect of this pedal," Hockenberry says. "Whereas a lot of delays that are using the bucket-brigade approach will try to make the sound as pristine as possible, we thought it would be cool to re-create the vibe of vintage echo devices, such as the original Echoplex. I think the Discoverer is somewhat unique in that regard."

Again, the Discoverer looks disarmingly simple with its complement of delay, sustain (repeats) and mix knobs, and a Modulation on/off switch. With the modulation off, the pedal has a clear delay sound that travels from short slap-echo to ambient delays of up to 600ms. You can get practically endless repeats by turning up the sustain knob. However, since this pedal is true-bypass (as are all the units in the group), there is no provision, such as a buffered-bypass option, that would enable the delay tails to fade off when the effect is bypassed. The repeats also have a crispness to them that remains present throughout the decay envelope instead of becoming progressively grungier, as you might expect. Of course, the Discoverer does all the usual "spaceship" stunts when you max the sustain and mix controls and sweep the delay knob.

Activating the modulation adds chorusing to the delay, which provides a chewy, lo-fi texture that sounds good (though not necessarily tape-like) at lower settings—especially for giving texture to rhythm parts. As the name implies, however, the Discoverer has the ability to venture beyond chorusing, and this is courtesy of its internal depth and rate trimpots, which are potent functions that can alter the modulation to the point of becoming sound-effecty if you get carried away tweaking their settings. The Modulation mode definitely allows the Discoverer to venture outside the purview of pure analog echo, and if that was the intent of the designers, they've largely succeeded. By all means, if you're shopping in the delay end of the stomp-box pool, the Discoverer is worth a listen.

MARTIN

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

SC-13E Special Burst

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

IN 2020, MARTIN ROLLED the dice on a radical new S design, and it paid off by becoming the company's most popular acoustic-electric. So what next? Double down, of course, or in this case, triple down. Building on the successful asymmetrical body shape, with its deep cutaway facilitated by a revolutionary linear dovetail neck attachment, Martin has expanded the range to include three new models. Joining the original SC-13E are the more affordable SC-10E ($1,299), the slightly upgraded SC-13E Special ($1,799) and the fancier SC-13E Special Burst, on review here. Like the original, all three new editions belong to the Road Series, meaning they are designed at Martin headquarters in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and built with veneered back and side woods at Martin's south-of-the-border factory in Mexico.

The Special Burst has stunning back and sides made of a fine ziricote veneer, with amazing dark-brown grains running deep and wide, highlighted by a glossy finish and attached to the top with bright-white binding. The top is available with or without a burst. We found the honey/tobacco aesthetic on this one highly complimentary, as is the multi-stripe black-and-white rosette that helps bring the whole color scheme together. As for the fingerboard inlay, described as "ziricote dot with plastic ivory pattern border," I could appreciate it's vaguely celestial vibe, especially in a darkened room. Others felt the inlay detracted from the Special Burst's sophisticated look, but everyone agreed that the nickel open-gear tuners with skeleton key buttons are a nice touch.

I haven't played many ziricote instruments, but this one sounds as sweet as it looks. I did spend considerable time reviewing the original SC-13E, with koa back and sides. As impressive as that was, this Special Burst looks and sounds a bit richer to my eyes and ears. There's heartiness to the tone, and it doesn't come at any loss of presence. The sound is as deep as it is wide. It's especially impressive coming from

SPECIFICATIONS

SC-13E Special Burst
CONTACT martinguitar.com
PRICE $1,999 street

NUT White Corian, 1.75" wide
NECK Select hardwood
FRETBOARD Ebony, 25.4" scale
FRETS 20
TUNERS Nickel open-gear
BODY Ziricote fine veneer back and sides, solid Sitka-spruce top
BRIDGE Ebony with compensated white Tusq saddle
ELECTRONICS L.R. Baggs Element
FACTORY STRINGS Martin Authentic Acoustic Lifespan 2.0 Custom Light Phosphor Bronze .011–.052
WEIGHT 4.4 lbs (as tested)
BUILT Mexico

KUDOS Infinitely stage-worthy acoustic-electric with crazy playability, chunky acoustic and amplified tone, sexy look and hip-hugging body hang
CONCERNS Lacks the soundhole tuner of the original SC-13E. Bright white circle inlays on dark ebony neck are a bit of an acquired taste. Not available in left-handed version

veneered rather than solid back and side woods, and the inherent durability makes it less likely to crack under the rigors of the road. Martin describes the bracing as "treble side scalloped X with non-scalloped tone bars." No matter how the physics work, the top is super resonant.

One of the primary feature upgrades here is the L.R. Baggs Element pickup. It has discrete flywheel tone and volume controls on the lip of the sound hole, and it indeed delivers a robust amplified sound, making this model worthy of a working pro. One thing missing from its predecessor is the onboard sound hole tuner. That was hip, but it's easy enough to attach a headstock tuner, and in the end, superior tone takes precedence.

Like all S models, the SC-13E Special Burst is built to shred, and the helical nature of its neck profile is key. In lower positions, it's full and chunky on the bass side. Move up the neck a bit, and the form becomes more evenly balanced to make barre chords a cinch. The heel-less nature of the Sure Align neck attachment at the 13th fret facilitates linear licks and stretch chords all the way to the top like no other acoustic, and practically like an electric guitar. Extra-light–gauge strings add to the ease of play. Interestingly, it seems that a hearty pick, such as the Luxe by Martin, is the perfect plucking partner. I found the action a little too low for fingerpicking with fake nails. For those that prefer heftier strings with more tension, fear not. The Sure Align system is extraordinarily adjustable, so Martin dealers can suit the SC-13E to any style on the spot.

Aside from the obvious shred ability for the seasoned guitarist, the almost effortless playability of the Special Burst also makes it an excellent instrument for ambitious beginners or folks who simply want a great-sounding guitar that doesn't fight back and encourages experimentation. I had such a friend over, and he fell in love with the guitar immediately, proclaiming, "I could write a hundred songs on this." I'd also recommend any Martin S model to older or injured players that would appreciate an ultra-low-resistance instrument for ergonomic and therapeutic reasons.

Others may have different ideas of what the "S" implies, but to my eyes the shape of its Grand Auditorium style body with 000 depth is sexy, and the playability is superior. The way it hugs the hips when standing is super comfortable, so the shape not only suggests forward motion, it also makes you want to move around. The tone is well balanced, and the Baggs Element delivers it with plenty of mojo through a P.A. The Special Burst attracts eyeballs the moment it emerges from its groovy gig bag. Considering its overall playability, strong sound and star stage presence, the Martin SC-13E Special Burst earns an Editors' Pick Award.

REVEREND

Reeves Gabrels Dirtbike Royale

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

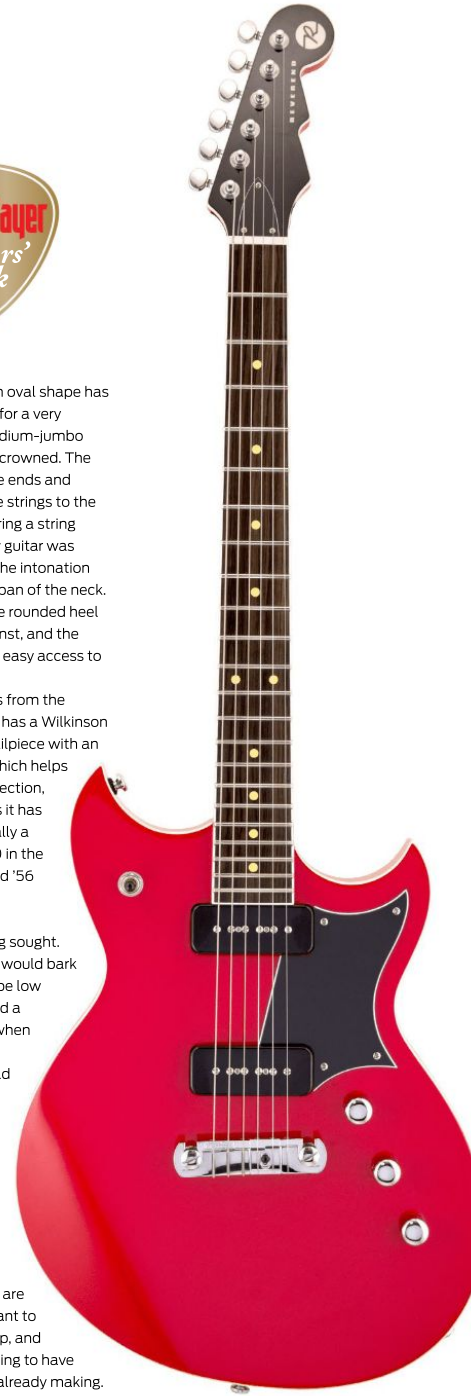
REEVES GABRELS HAS a long list of credits that includes stints with Tin Machine, David Bowie and, since 2012, the Cure. The Dirtbike Royale is his latest Reverend Guitars signature model. It joins the clan as the only non-vibrato guitar among a group that includes the Dirtbike, Signature and Signature RG-SUS — all equipped with Wilkinson WVS50 IIK vibratos — and the semi-hollow Spacehawk, which has a Bigsby B-50 with a roller bridge.

Dressed in cool Feline Gray or Royale Red, and decked out with full binding, the Dirtbike Royale is a sleek guitar with an offset double-cutaway korina body, and a set, three-piece korina neck that carries a 24 ¾–inch scale (12-inch radius) ebony fretboard. The neck's medium oval shape has just the right amount of girth for a very comfortable grip, and the medium-jumbo frets are polished and evenly crowned. The nut is also very smooth on the ends and perfectly notched to route the strings to the pin-lock tuners without requiring a string tree. The action on our review guitar was low and free of buzzing, and the intonation was tuneful throughout the span of the neck. This setneck design has a nice rounded heel for your hand to push up against, and the deep cutaways allow full and easy access to the high frets.

The Dirtbike Royale differs from the original model in two ways: It has a Wilkinson GTB Stop-Bar wraparound tailpiece with an adjustable B-string saddle, which helps steer it in a Les Paul Junior direction, and to further the LP leanings it has P-90–style pickups, specifically a MojoTone Hot '56 Quiet P-90 in the bridge position and a standard '56 Quiet P-90l at the neck. It's a combination that delivers the performance Gabrels has long sought.

"I wanted something that would bark when I wanted it to and also be low noise," the guitarist says. "I had a band called Modern Farmer when the first Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier heads came out. I had a '56 Gibson Les Paul Junior and a '59 Les Paul Special, and my whole thing was, 'The volume control is the noise gate!' So the idea of having a good hum-canceling P-90 is something I've been trying to do for 25 years.

"These MojoTone pickups are stock, too. Sometimes you want to have a signature model pickup, and then you realize you're just going to have them make the thing they're already making.



SPECIFICATIONS

Reverend Reeves Gabrels Dirtbike Royale
CONTACT reverendguitars.com
PRICE $1,199 street (two-tone teardrop case optional)

NUT Bonite, 1.692" wide
NECK Three-piece korina. Medium Oval shape
FRETBOARD Ebony, 24.75" scale, 12" radius.
FRETS 22 medium jumbo
TUNERS Reverend Pin-Lock
BODY Korina
BRIDGE Wilkinson GTB Stop-Bar
PICKUPS MojoTone: Hot Quiet-Coil P-90 Soapbar (bridge), standard Quiet-Coil P-90 Soapbar (neck)
CONTROLS Volume, tone, bass contour. Three-way selector
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario .009–.046
WEIGHT 7.5 lbs (as tested)
EXTRAS Available in Feline Gray and Royale Red
BUILT Korea

KUDOS Excellent playability and tones. MojoTone Soapbar pickups are quiet and very responsive

On the bridge pickup, with the bass full up, you get a cocked-wah sound, but not so much that you can't use a cocked wah with it!"

The tones that the Dirtbike Royale dishes out range from very clear with a touch of twanginess to rich, mids-forward growl when you unleash the beast. MojoTone's patent-applied-for Quiet-Coil P-90 is a hum-canceling design that features low-gauss Alnico magnets to provide vintage tone without the noise. They're an excellent match for this guitar, which delivers supremely cool clean and overdriven tones that have great dynamic sensitivity and clean up beautifully when the guitar volume is turned down.

Played though a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Victoria Double Deluxe 2x12 combo, the Dirtbike Royale easily covered territory that ranged from James Brown funk to Chris Stapleton–style alt-country dirt to '70s/'80s hard-rock grind. The fact that Gabrels deploys it onstage for all the textures that Cure tunes require is a testament to the DBR's versatility.

In either Feline Gray or Royale Red, the Dirtbike is eye-catching.

The volume control preserves highs when rolled back, and the tone control is well voiced and can be run super low if needed, without muddying the sound. The bass contour control is highly effective too, as it allows you to get stringy single-coil tones at low settings and beefy, humbucker-like sounds when you turn it up. It's an extremely effective control that lets you very easily dial-in the guitar to your liking. Setting it about three-quarters up sounded great with our test amps, but there's plenty of range to adjust for any rig you're playing through.

The Dirtbike Royale is well crafted, lightweight and tuneful, and one of the best realizations of a modern P-90 axe currently available. We're giving it an Editors' Pick Award and suggest you give one a spin.

PRESONUS

AudioBox GO Audio Interface

TESTED BY ANDY McDONOUGH

LIKE MANY MUSICIANS, I've made an iPad a critical piece of my music gear. I travel quite a bit, so I rely on it to collect my musical thoughts for songwriting and arrangements, and I've learned that you don't need a high-powered DAW to make music while you're on the go. In most cases, even GarageBand for the iPad can get the job done, but relying on the tablet's built-in microphone, while useful for some situations, can be limiting. So I was happy to see PreSonus engineers had figured out a lightweight and ultra-compact design for a mobile 2x2 audio interface, and I couldn't wait to check it out.

The new AudioBox Go is USB powered, so there's no power supply to plug in. It offers two inputs: one combo input for XLR or ¼-inch TS line inputs, and one ¼-inch TS input for instrument. Front-panel controls allow you to set levels and mix the two inputs with the aid of two LED clipping indicators. There are ¼-inch TRS jacks for the left and right main outputs, to send signals off to powered speakers, but the ¼-inch TRS stereo headphone out was appealing to me for monitoring and playback while on the road. I also appreciated that the unit can supply phantom power for condenser mics.

We all have different needs, and the three features of the AudioBox GO that stood out for me were the high-quality XMAX-L solid-state microphone preamp, the phantom power, and the unit's light and compact design. I explored each of these features in a pre-production session while away from my home studio. My plan was to work out a rhythm-section arrangement in GarageBand for an upcoming session. I'd set up the song using one of the GarageBand drummers, then add guitar, bass, and a reference vocal track with the help of the AudioBox GO.

First and most important to me was the quality I would get from this portable interface. I wasn't planning to make any final recordings in my hotel room, but I wanted the best possible sound, since I'd be distributing these tracks to other players. And while I was happy that the company's XMAX-L preamp was one of the core components, I was also concerned about how the PreSonus engineers would have handled implementing this well-known and good-sounding preamp using only the power provided by a USB 3.0 via a USB bus connection.

While I can typically get more headphone output from an AC-powered audio interface, the levels on the AudioBox GO were sufficient to make a recording, and the quality was very good. I tried two popular CAD condenser microphones (one large diaphragm for vocals and one cardioid instrument mic) and was able to record solid and clean tracks with sufficient headroom.

The unit's size and weight were equally impressive. The AudioBox GO has a plastic case with rounded edges for easy storage in a bag or pouch, and it seems sturdy enough, though you'll want to install the little rubber feet provided to keep the lightweight unit from sliding around on the table. Knobs for the two inputs, mix, main out and headphone level protrude from the face, but they seem solid, are nicely spaced and work smoothly.

The only indicators on the unit are LEDs that indicate USB connection and clipping on the channels, plus a 48-volt phantom power button that glows blue — a nice feature to remind you that power is being applied to a microphone. And, if you had any doubts about the little AudioBox GO being

SPECIFICATIONS

Audio Box GO USB Audio Interface
CONTACT presonus.com
PRICE $79

INPUTS 1 x XLR-1/4" mic/line combo, 1 x instrument line input
PHANTOM POWER Yes (48v)
OUTPUTS ¼-inch TRS main, ¼-inch TRS stereo headphone
CONTROLS Input levels for channels 1 and 2, mix, main and headphone output levels
INDICATORS Clipping LED for channels 1 and 2, 48v power on/off
FREQUENCY RESPONSE 20 Hz to 20 kHz
RESOLUTION AND SAMPLE RATES 24-bit at 44.1, 48, 88.2, or 96kHz
POWER SOURCE USB-C bus
DIMENSIONS 4.25 W x 3.3" D x 1.73 H
WEIGHT 0.51 lbs

KUDOS Light, portable, great sound and phantom power. No AC adaptor needed
CONCERNS Low, but sufficient, headphone output

professionally designed, it works with the free PreSonus Universal Control app, which allows users to update firmware and make adjustments to sample rate (44.1, 48, 88.2 or 96 kHz) and block size for optimal performance.

The AudioBox GO manual explains how to set up popular audio applications, but the unit comes with PreSonus's own Studio One Prime DAW software, which you can download free once you register your purchase at presonus.com. The unit works with macOS 10.13 or later and Windows 10 or later, with additional details about using it with Chrome OS, iOS/iPadOS, and Android available at presonus.com.

All in all, I found the diminutive AudioBox GO a great lightweight travel companion, one that would pack away easily and free me from having to use the built-in iPad microphone when a track called for the use of a condenser microphone or direct input. Nicely done!

The AudioBox GO has well-spaced controls, critical LED indicators and sufficient inputs and outputs, including a ¼-inch stereo headphone jack.

BLUES SPECIALS

BY LINDY FRALIN

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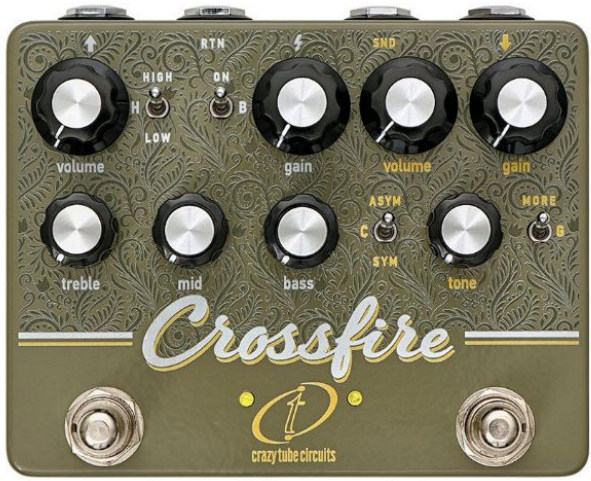

CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS

Crossfire

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

IT'S RIGHT THERE in the name — a reference to one of Stevie Ray Vaughan's best-known songs. Crazy Tube Circuits (CTC) makes no bones about its Crossfire pedal giving you access to some of the Texas blues phenom's coveted tones. As they put it, "Crossfire is inspired by one of the most iconic pedal-amp combinations in guitar history." In fact, this dual-effect pedal offers much more.

The left side is voiced to emulate blackface amps like the Fender Twin and Super Reverbs. CTC uses analog circuitry to mimic the sonic signatures of those vintage legends. A headroom switch lets you choose the super-clean solid-state rectified 4x6L6GC power amp sound of a Twin or the distortable sponginess of a tube-rectified 2x6L6GC Super Reverb.

The right side provides the famous green pedal (read: Ibanez Tube Screamer) mid-hump overdrive. In addition to re-creating the circuit of this classic overdrive, CTC added some of the modifications the pedal has seen throughout the years. A clipping toggle switch selects between original symmetrical or asymmetrical clipping, while a gain toggle adds more gain and alters the low frequency response, as if you were running two of the pedals in series.

A passive effects loop allows pedals to be placed between the overdrive and the amp side. When both sides are in bypass, the loop is true bypass as well, but this just refers to the signal path. If the pedal in the loop is on when you shut both Crossfire sides off, it still affects the signal. Think of it as running three independent pedals.

Using just the amp side, I set the toggle for the 2x6L6 simulation and the gain for a bit of breakup. I turned the treble up, the mids down, and the bass about halfway for a superb Super Reverb tone. This provided instant SRV rhythm sounds, while driving it slightly with the right-side Screamer pushed it into Stevie lead territory.

But this pedal is no one-trick pony. Cranking the bass and mids on the amp side and switching from a Strat to a Les Paul served up some Hubert Sumlin–through-a–tweed Deluxe tones. Toggling to the 4x6L6 setting while lowering the mids shifted the tone toward a Twin and gave my 1x10 Supro Comet the girth of a 2x12 Twin, and adding the overdrive side set for extra gain produced luscious, Santana-like sustain. Even at higher gain settings the pedal remained sensitive to both touch and guitar volume settings.

So, yes, the Crossfire can deliver SRV sounds, but if you aren't tuned down a half-step, using telegraph-wire gauge strings and playing as if your life depended on it (and loud enough to get arrested), don't expect to sound like him. The good news is that tons of warm, American, tube-like tones and a gargantuan variety of malleable grit from slight drive to near fuzz reside in this solid board-friendly pedal.

SPECIFICATIONS

Crossfire
CONTACT crazytubecircuits.com
PRICE $229

CONTROLS Overdrive: gain, tone, volume, clipping toggle, gain toggle internal headroom switch. Amp: gain, volume, treble, mid, bass, headroom toggle switch, bright toggle switch
EXTRAS A passive effects loop between the overdrive and amp in a box. An internal switch provides 18V DC to the overdrive circuit
SIZE 4.5" W x 3.5" D x 1.25" H
BUILT Greece

KUDOS Provides SRV tones and many other types of classic sounds, for a very versatile drive pedal
CONCERNS Non-SRV fans might unfortunately pass it up

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TWA

Mk. III Triskelion Harmonic Energizer

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

AN ADVENTUROUS PEDAL to say the least, Totally Wycked Audio's original Triskelion debuted in 2010 as an updated reproduction of the Systech Harmonic Energizer used by Frank Zappa, Greg Lake, Joe Walsh and other '70s-era icons. As described by TWA, the Triskelion was essentially a parametric midrange filter with adjustable peak and an obscene amount of gain. You could vary the mids to create cocked-wah sounds, and its powerful output allowed for massive distortion and infinite sustain. It also offered extended high-frequency range and the option of expression control over the filter sweep.

SPECIFICATIONS

TWA Mk. III Triskelion Harmonic Energizer
CONTACT godlyke.com
PRICE $229 street

CONTROLS Energy, Variant Mass, amplitude. Amplitude on/off switch (LED indicates whether gain is on (bright) or off (dim). VM Shift on/off switch (shifts frequency setting on the Variant Mass control up one octave)
FOOT SWITCH S3 relay/mechanical true-bypass switching (in case of power loss the unit reverts to bypass mode)
I/O In and out jacks. 1/8" FSW jack (allows Amplitude to be activated via optional foot switch). 1/8" EXP jack (allows optional expression-pedal control of the Variant Mass pot)
EXTRAS LC slider switch cuts low-end by 6dB/octave
POWER SUPPLY 9VDC (adapter not included)
BUILT USA

KUDOS A powerful and compact pedal that facilitates dialing-in tones with surgical precision
CONCERNS None

The Triskelion Mk. III (or TK-03) is the latest incarnation and features a more compact Hammond 1590B chassis, as well as several functions that were absent on the Mk. II version when it was released in 2015. Back now are the Variant Mass boost switch, which adds upper-midrange emphasis to the filter, along with 30 or so hertz of low-frequency response that TWA says had "mysteriously vanished" from the Mk. II. A wicked-looking pedal with its gloss-red paint, gold-hued knobs and raised throwing-star logo, the Mk. III is also easy to grok once you get used to how the knobs and switches interact.

On the right side is the Variant Mass knob, which dials in the frequency you want to boost, and on the left side is the Energy knob, which adjusts the peak of the selected frequency. Setting Energy halfway up and sweeping the Variant Mass clockwise from low to high is like working the rocker on a wah pedal, but with more lows and more highs. Activating the VM Shift mini-toggle shifts the frequencies up an octave to provide more clarity and top-end bite, while the mini-toggle on the right activates the amplitude knob that adjust the gain of the circuit. Turn up the knob to control the amount of boost, or you can connect a foot switch (not included) to the 1/8-inch jack marked FSW and turn the amplitude on and off. This is handy for setting a preset boost that can be kicked on and off as needed.

The 1/8-inch EXP jack lets you connect an optional expression pedal to manipulate the Variant Mass in real time and shape tones on the fly. A related function that may be useful with some instruments is the low-cut slider switch (accessible though an opening in the right side) that trims the low end by 6dB per octave to allow fine-tuning expression pedal control of the VM range.

Played though a variety of amps from across the gain spectrum — from a Fender Deluxe Reverb to a Mesa/Boogie Mark 5:25 — and using single-coils and humbuckers, the Mk. III proved a powerful tone-sculpting tool that facilitates dialing in anything from glassy and super-funky clean sounds to crushing grind when driving a high-gain amplifier. Set a dirty-rhythm tone on the amp and then click on the Mk. III to deliver a cool, punch-through lead sound. I also liked using the Mk. III in front of a Fulltone OCD pedal (set to a moderate level of drive) to get controlled feedback and infinite sustain at the touch of a button. It's easier and more predictable than angling the guitar next to the speakers to get the same effect, and the ultra-quiet Mk. III doesn't add noise.

Three is a charm as they say, and TWA has put it all together with the Triskelion Mk. III. This pedal is a booster like no other and well worth the investment for anyone who wants to be able to dial in the exact tone and feel they're after.

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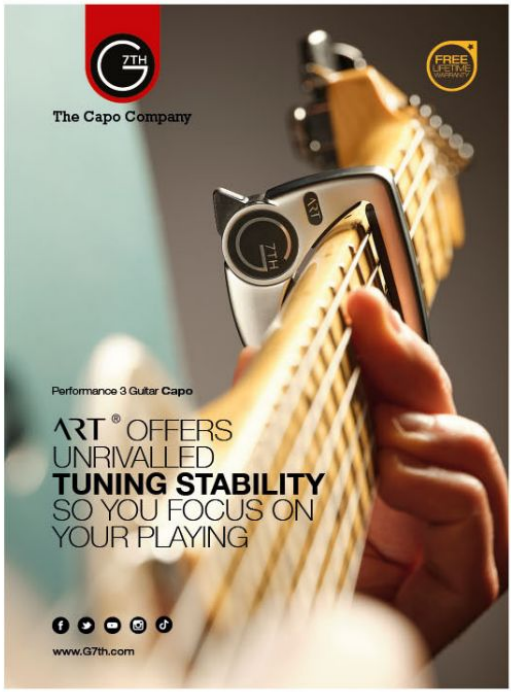

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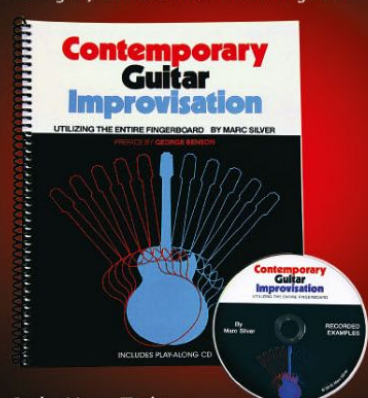

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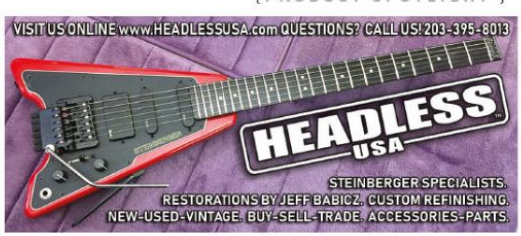

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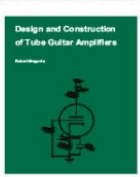

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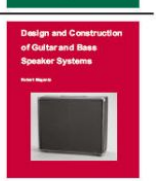

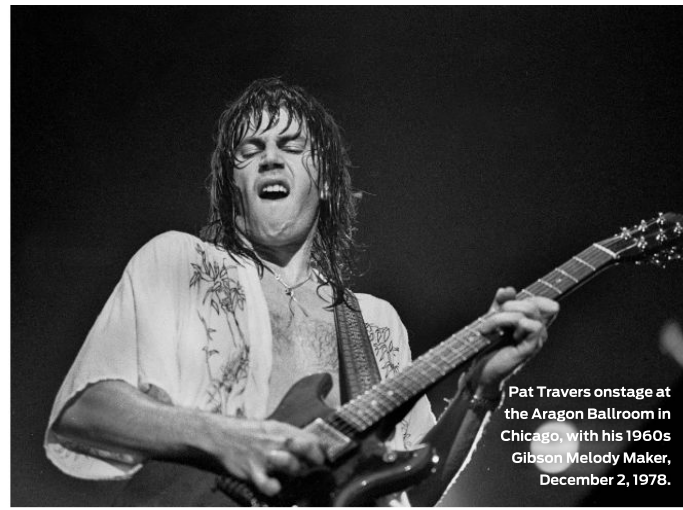

Pat Travers onstage at the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago, with his 1960s Gibson Melody Maker, December 2, 1978.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

How I Wrote...

"Snortin' Whiskey"

Pat Travers spills out the tale behind his classic 1980 cut.

BY JOE BOSSO

SOME MUSICIANS HAVE a love/hate relationship with their hit songs. Not so for guitarist Pat Travers and his 1980 flamethrower blues-rock smash, "Snortin' Whiskey." "I'm totally good with it," he says. "It's a really cool and solid rock song. It's not supposed to be profound. In fact, its silliness is one of the great things about it.

"Plus, it's got a killer opening riff. The second I start playing it, I get an immediate response. What's not to like about that?"

BAD BEHAVIOR

That riff is one Travers had been toying with a few years before he wrote "Snortin' Whiskey." A friend had shown the guitarist a country lick, and over time he added a blues-rock flavor to it. Several years later, in 1979, Travers and his rhythm section — bassist Peter "Mars" Cowling and drummer Tommy Aldridge — were in a Miami rehearsal studio working on material for his fifth studio album, *Crash and Burn*. Hours went by as the band waited for their second guitarist, Pat Thrall, to show. "We jammed on a number of things, including that riff," Travers recalls.

Finally, at 5 p.m., three hours after the appointed start time, Thrall made his entrance with his girlfriend in tow. "They were both sort of wobbling in and looking pretty worse for wear," Travers says. "I said, 'PT, what have you been doing?' He smiled and said, 'Oh, you know... snortin' whiskey and drinkin' cocaine.' He was just being funny — I don't think he meant it — but I said, 'Hey, that sounds like a song.'" All at once, Travers jumped on the riff, and the song — lyrics and music — took shape. "It took about seven minutes from the moment we began playing."

FAST AND EASY

Occasionally, Travers would road-test songs live before recording, but he was so intent on capturing the moment that he raced Cowling and Aldridge into Miami's Quadradial Recording Studio. "Pat Thrall wasn't there for the main session," he says, "but the three of us went to it. It was fast and easy. We recorded everything live. That's me playing and singing at the same time. After a few takes, we had the song nailed."

Thrall overdubbed his parts during another session. "His guitar comes in on the second verse, where he starts answering my vocals," Travers notes. The song contains not one but two fireball solos, the first played by Thrall, the second by Travers.

"I had an idea what PT should do for his solo," Travers says, "but he just took off on this breakdown kind of riff. It became this funky mid-section break, almost James Brown–like. I had no idea he was going to do it, but it came out great."

For guitars, Travers relied on one of his favorite models, a 1960s Gibson Melody Maker he purchased in Sheffield, England, fitted with Gibson humbucking pickups. Thrall usually recorded with two Strats: one with a whammy bar, the other without. "I'm pretty sure he used the the one without the whammy," Travers says.

GOING SIDEWAYS

Travers knew that he had a solid recording, but because of the song's lyrical content, he was concerned about the track's commercial prospects. "I wasn't glorifying drugs and alcohol," he says. "If anything, the song always seemed silly and goofy to me. Still, you can never be sure how anybody is going to react." His worries proved unfounded: The track promptly hit number one on numerous FM rock stations, propelling *Crash and Burn* into the top 20 of *Billboard*'s Pop Albums Chart.

Years later, Travers got word that "Snortin' Whiskey" was to be included in Alexander Payne's 2004 movie, *Sideways*. Without knowing the plot of the film or how the song would be used, he went to a screening — and was delighted by what he saw.

"The song came on during this really nasty scene with this trashy couple going at it in their bedroom," he says. "When the one actor runs naked into the street and the song is still playing, oh, my God! I laughed my head off. It was fantastic. I've had a couple of my songs in movies, but this was amazing. And the film was an Academy Award winner. I can't complain about that."

From the time of its release, "Snortin' Whiskey" has remained a staple of Travers' live shows. It ranks second only to his cover of Stan Lewis's "Boom Boom (Out Go the Lights)" as his most-played song. "I couldn't see doing a show without playing it," he says of "Snortin' Whiskey." "I mean, on a very basic level, it just wouldn't be right."

"WHEN THE ONE ACTOR RUNS NAKED INTO THE STREET AND THE SONG IS STILL PLAYING, OH, MY GOD! I LAUGHED MY HEAD OFF. IT WAS FANTASTIC"

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